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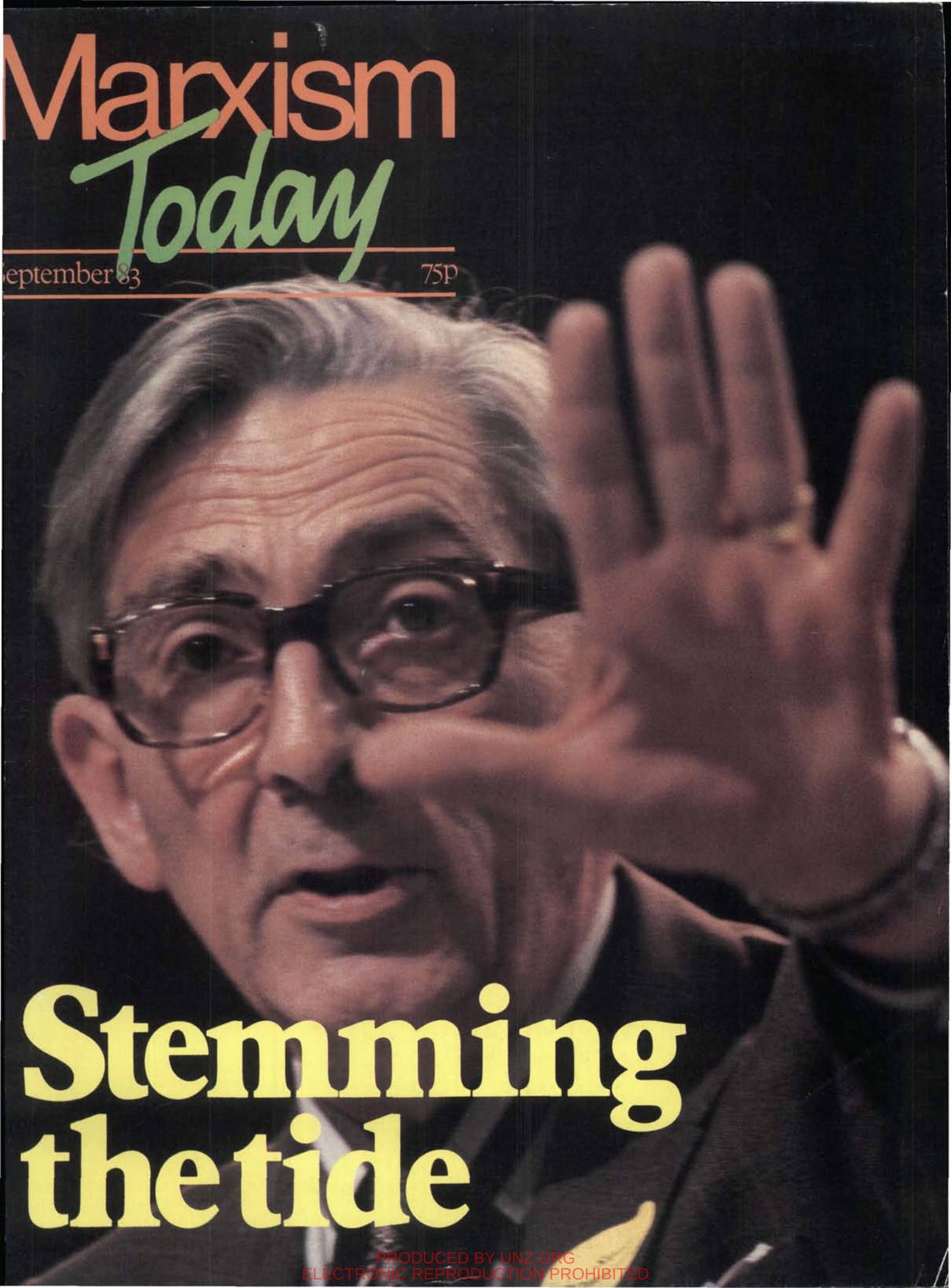

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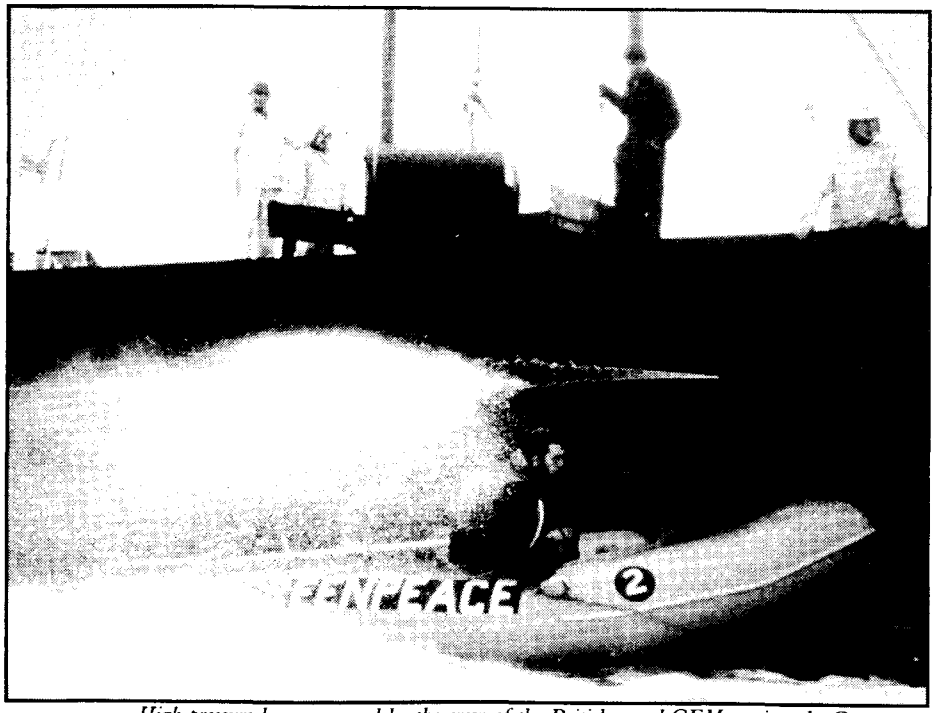
A DROP IN THE OCEAN?

The UK has traditionally used the oceans as a dumping area for all manner of waste but the type which has recently caused an international furore is that by-product of the nuclear arms and power industries, radioactive waste.

It was in 1949 that the UK began dumping radioactive garbage into the sea as part of a distinct policy of waste management based on the theory that such a small amount of radioactivity, compared to the natural radioactivity present in the seas, would cause no adverse effects as it was dispersed and diluted in the vastness of the oceans. In these early days, no one site was identified as the approved tippng area. A variety of dumping areas were used, including the Hurd Deep, just 20 miles north of the Channel Island of Guernsey. As appreciation of the potential damage which could be done by radiation increased, so concern about where the garbage was tipped grew. In 1967, a site 500 miles from the south west tip of the UK was identified as a suitably remote area in which to dump, and since then this site has been used by four countries — the UK, Belgium, Switzerland and Holland — and has become known as the North East Atlantic Dumpsite.

The responsibility for dumping rests ultimately with the OECD's Nuclear Energy Agency. International negotiations are carried out under the auspices of the London Dumping Convention which the UK ratified in 1975 and which is designed to control pollution of international waters caused by dumping from ships. Each dumping nation must abide by the regulations set out in the Convention's appendices: the dumping of highly radioactive waste is forbidden, the dumping of other types of radioactive waste must be carried out only after the competent authorities in the dumping nations have issued a special licence and notified the other 50 or so contracting nations through the secretariat, provided by the International Maritime Organisation. The Covention requires that nations wishing to dump firstly satisfy themselves that a land-based storage alternative is neither economically nor environmentally viable. The authorising government department must also be satisfied that the dumping will cause no adverse environmental effects.

This then is the background to the issue which has, over the last three years, gained international notoriety and has led to official complaints from the Spanish government to the UK, diplomatically worded, but nonetheless direct criticism from the Nordic nations of the UK's dumping programme and a string of arrests, direct actions and feverish High Court actions as the UK desperately tried to defend what it saw as its inalienable rights to use international waters as its own private dustbin.



High pressure hoses are used by the crew of the British vessel GEM against the Greenpeace inflatable, which is trying to prevent the dumping of nuclear waste in the sea.

The arguments *for* dumping are as simplistic as those against. The UK will argue that the available science gives dumping a clean bill of health. Environmentalists will say that this science is far from exhaustive, is acknowledged to be lacking and does not take account of the projected and dramatic increase in the volume of waste which will need to be dumped as a result of a vastly expanded domestic and international nuclear power and weapons programme. Furthermore, the only available hard evidence to hand as to the effect of dumping — derived from direct sampling of the US dump site at the Farallon Islands before they abandoned the practice in 1970 — disproves the 'disperse and dilute' philosophy on which the Atlantic dumping is based. As a result of surveys carried out by the US Environmental Protection Agency it has been conclusively shown that the sediments around the dumping area have taken up radioactivity spilled from imploded barrels. Concentrations of radioactive caesium were detected a quarter of a million times higher than could be accounted for by atmospheric fallout from nuclear weapons tests of the 50s and 60s. Those opposing the dumping drew attention to these and other facts which showed that the current operation, despite wounded cries to the contrary, is largely based on assumptions and guess work, and, at best, inadequate computer modelling and laboratory experiments. As this scientific controversy deepened over the years, the 'onus of proof' argument came to the fore and culminated at this year's meeting of the London Dumping Convention in the UK offering to stop dumping if it could be conclusively proved that dumping was causing a real risk. Many felt that the conditions put on this offer relegated it to the realms of fantasy and argued that the onus should be put squarely on the dumpers to prove the safety of the programme before pursuing it further.

This impasse was resolved to the satisfaction of all contracting nations to the LDC bar six at the February meeting of the Convention held at the London HQ of the IMO. After dismissing resolutions calling for a complete ban for an indefinite period from two Pacific Island nations faced with the prospect of Japanese dumping in the Pacific, the Convention was faced with a more moderate call from Spain to suspend dumping until a scientific review could be carried out of all available evidence. This would have effectively been a two year moratorium. Given that some of the waste dumped has a half-life of 24,400 years, most nations felt it was an eminently reasonable request in the face of scientific disharmony. The resolution was passed by

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19 votes to 6.

The Convention had given a clear indication of its wishes to the UK which is responsible for dumping 90% of all waste into the Atlantic. It had also put intolerable pressure on the Netherlands, Belgium and Switzerland. The Netherlands capitulated and agreed not to dump again. Its nuclear power company produced a report on how it wished to land-store its waste at least until the turn of the century. Switzerland agreed not to dump in 1984 but still intends to carry out its 1983 operation. Belgium is still agonising over what it should do but it is expected that they too will go along with the LDC decision. This leaves the UK.

Despite the performing of breathtaking twists and turns to justify its position, the UK simply refuses to accept the resolution passed by the LDC and intends to carry on regardless. They announced this intention within days of the LDC meeting. It was pointed out that the EEC had passed similar resolutions condemning dumping and that even Mrs Thatcher had signed a declaration calling on nations not to dump radioactive waste in the Pacific. But where the UK's nuclear programme was concerned, the international waters of the Atlantic were fair game. The dump would go ahead. Trade union activity has since put paid to these plans. The National Union of Seamen passed a resolution calling for agreement with other transport related unions to impose a ban on the dumping. In June of this year, that agreement was reached, resulting in the specially converted ship, the Atlantic Fisher, remaining in the port of Barrow, the waste marooned in sidings at Didcot and London; and Madrid, Copenhagen, Brussels and other major cities seeing widespread and sustained demonstrations against UK embassies, calling for the UK to accept international public opinion.

The issue of radioactive waste dumping goes far deeper than just whether a minority of nations should be allowed to dump their 'low-level' waste into international waters. Although it is little publicised, it has not been lost on the LDC that the UK, along with most other pro-nuclear nations is right now developing a programme in which the 'highly active' waste from the civil and military applications of nuclear technology will be disposed of at sea. The current dumping programme is merely a pathfinder for a massive onslaught at a later date. At present, the situation is in stalemate and could remain so for a year or two, if the pressure groups are vigilant. Then will come the battle for the Atlantic.

Pete Wilkinson

SQUEEZING THE POOR

The ground work for yet another cut in benefits for the unemployed is being laid assiduously and cynically by the Tory government. Official protestations that nothing will be done this year have carefully avoided excluding the idea that linking benefits to prices will be dropped. Indeed, it is being carefully fostered by apparently casual remarks from Chancellor Nigel Lawson, backed up by the clearly identifiable use of the lobby system and now Mrs Thatcher has announced a review of welfare state spending, which could be the forerunner of the final demise of the national insurance system.

Political journalists, many of whom have Tory or Social Democrat sympathies, have done little to question the basic assumption that somehow benefits remain too high. Yet a casual glance at the figures shows that the living standards of the unemployed have been seriously damaged by a succession of measures over the past four years.

The Department of Health and Social Security obligingly gives some idea by publishing social security statistics every year, including tables giving the relative value of various benefits. Updated figures of the latest edition, which have not been published elsewhere, show that basic unemployment benefit was worth just about the same in real terms last November as it was in September 1971. Relative to male manual workers' earnings, it was worth less than in 1948, when national insurance was introduced. Even in November 1982, benefits were worth more than the government had intended, for that was the date of the infamous 2% 'overshoot' in benefit increases, which the government wanted to claw back this year until overwhelming pressure from its own back benchers forced them to resort instead to changing the method for calculating increases. The effect will be much the same, of course, but the blow will be softened a little by the decision to restore the 5% 'abatement' imposed in 1980 to unemployment benefits in advance of taxing them.

The basic unemployment benefit is no longer the main benefit on which the jobless rely, but it is worth remembering that it is only recently that the unemployed have stopped being paid the same basic rate as pensioners. The change did not happen until October 1973, when the unemployed were given an increase of 8.9%, while pensioners were given 14.8%. Different increases were applied in most subsequent years, leaving the unemployed with a basic benefit worth about £24 a week in real terms last November, while the pension was worth more than £31 a week. No-one can suggest that the basic pension has yet reached a level guaranteeing a reasonable standard of living to the retired, making it even more disturbing that the gap has widened so much.

When it was first introduced, the unemployed — or the minority of them who qualified — were cushioned by the earnings related supplement, since abolished by the 1979 Tory government. Like pensioners, they could also claim supplementary benefit if that still didn't bring them up to the official poverty line.

But, unless they are over 60, male and prepared to help the government massage the unemployment figures by no longer registering for work, they can now only get the basic rate. Even that is subject, like unemployment benefit, to tax. And, as the Social Security Policy Inspectorate made clear in a report the government reluctantly published under pressure in July, some do not even get that. Social security officials were found to be applying the 'voluntary unemployment' deduction of 20 or 40% of the basic rate (for those supposedly giving up their jobs of their own accord) just to be on the safe side. The government is now trying desperately to identify the 56,000 unemployed people believed to have been underpaid because overzealous staff assumed that they had willingly given up their jobs.

Even the anodyne Social Security Advisory Committee has described the denial of the long term rate to most unemployed claimants as 'wholly unjust'. But the government goes on encouraging the idea that people can be forced back to work if benefits are cut yet again.

All the evidence, official and unofficial, still shows that the majority of unemployed people are suffering real hardship, and that most of them are still drawn from the ranks of the semi-skilled and unskilled. If there is too little difference between incomes from benefit and from work, it owes more to the government's pursuit of even lower wages for the least organised and lowest paid workers, rather than to over generous benefits. The discussion is, and always has been, a debate about the incomes of the poor.

With unemployment still rising, and long term unemployment at well over one million, any attempt to cut the living standards of the jobless back even further can only create more hardship. In April, 30,000 young people aged 18 to 24 had been continuously out of work for more than

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three years. One of the leaked Think Tank papers before the general election forecast that by the end of 1983, between 50 and 70% of the labour force under 18 might never have had a proper job. It went on: 'The effect in terms of future training skills, attitudes to work and opportunities for crime and other forms of social disruption is undoubtedly a matter of justifiable concern.'

The potential for more riots will increase if benefits are squeezed further, which may be one reason why some of the Tory wets protested just before the summer recess. Tim Yeo, director of the Spastics Society and the new Tory MP for South Suffolk, declared in the Commons that the importance of maintaining unemployment benefit in real terms was recognised on both sides of the House.

Sir Anthony Meyer, who finally survived as member for Clwyd North, added that he was 'disturbed when I hear the Chancellor of the Exchequer suggesting there is plenty of work for those who wish to find it.' What's more he was bothered by ministers 'when they appear to suggest that the level of unemployment benefit is such as to provide a disincentive for people to go out and work.' Their protests were made during the debate on the Consolidated Fund Bill to a largely empty chamber. But the indication that not all Tories are fooled is scarcely a guarantee that the government will not drop the prices index next year if, as seems likely, their monetarist policies continue to founder.

That possibility is becoming more likely, both because of the new review announced by Mrs Thatcher, and because of the muted response to the erosions that have already worn away much of the national insurance system. Working people are paying higher contributions for lower benefits: the earnings link for pensions has been dropped; 90% of sickness benefit has been abolished with the new employers statutory sick pay scheme, disabled people who will never work again have been reclassified as short term claimants. The unemployed, as always, have most to lose.

What is needed is not a defensive campaign to safeguard the pittance the unemployed now get, but an offensive in favour of better benefits.

Their benefits should be linked to *earnings*, not prices, as happens in most other industrialised countries where much higher benefits are paid. The low paid already suffer higher inflation rates than the rest because so much of their meagre incomes are spent on necessities which tend to rise faster than other things. Linking unemployment benefit to prices is, therefore, a guarantee that the living standards of the unemployed will continue to fall.

Thatcher and Lawson are unlikely to listen, of course. But the constant cultivation of the idea that the unemployed are better off on benefit has clearly worked. So could an offensive begun now to demonstrate that the unemployed are suffering too much and deserve better treatment.

Pat Healey

CHILE'S SHAKY JUNTA

On September 11 General Augusto Pinochet will be celebrating the tenth anniversary of Chile's 'liberation from communism' — the brutal military coup of 1973 that left 30,000 dead, a million driven into exile and a nation under the heel of terror. Most observers think it will be his last anniversary — if, indeed, he lasts that long.

Only 18 months ago, Pinochet seemed firmly in control and quite likely to last out his self-appointed term of office until 1989. Opposition existed, and both trade unions and left political parties had revived considerably after the coup. But the opposition was plagued by disunity, resist-

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ance activity involved few, and Pinochet's support amongst the upper and middle classes seemed secure.

The monetarist economic model drawn up by George Schultz (now US Secretary of State) and his Chicago team after the coup had created a 'boom' that was lauded by monetarists worldwide. But it was only a 'boom' compared to the 'trough' that was first created in 1974-5. And it was mainly a boom for the rich. Protection for Chilean industry was removed, and exports of primary products (copper, food etc), encouraged. Exchange controls were abolished. The result was a flood of loans from private banks abroad, used to finance a consumer spree of luxury, imported goods: in 1980, Chile imported 195 times as much perfume as in 1970. Foreign competition, together with the world recession, caused a slump in demand for Chilean manufactures.

As the foreign debt caught up with the ability to repay, the whole system began to collapse. Financial empires built on foreign loans tumbled, taking the savings of thousands of people with them. As creditors chased their money, bankruptcies soared. Whole industries vanished, while farms were sold to pay debts, and then left idle. The confidence, and the pockets, of the middle classes, and even of the capitalists, was hit. Suddenly, disenchantment with Pinochet spread from the poor and working class — who were now suffering 40% unemployment and real hunger on a wide scale — to Pinochet's traditional sectors of support. The economic crisis gave rise to a political one.

Meanwhile, the mass opposition movement too was changing. In 1978, the unions were given a narrow legal space in which to operate, and began to grow in strength, organisation and militancy. But the movement remained split between left-wingers, centrists and those who, initially at least, had supported the coup. By the beginning of 1982, however, the economic situation had become so bad that united union action was deemed necessary even by conservatives. Tucapel Jimenez, president of the white collar civil servants' union, made a call for a united opposition; he was abducted on the way to a meeting to set up the front, and brutally murdered. His death, however, became a rallying point for union unity, and throughout 1982 united action by trade unions, as well as other sections, steadily developed.

The junta was alarmed at this growing confidence of the opposition, and stepped up repression. Between 1981 and 1982 the number of arrests and detentions doubled.

Anti-riot policemen and students meet each other. Chile, summer 83.

But as the economic crisis deepened, and as it became clear that Pinochet's former supporters were deserting him, so popular organisations — the unions, shantytown dwellers, women's groups, sections of the church — realised that he *could* be overthrown.

Years of painstaking, dangerous work by left activists — with the Communist Party often taking a prominent role — succeeded in building mass movements that, from August 1982, began to mushroom. Demonstrations in August, September and December were met with rough repression, but each time grew bigger. The junta was wavering, maintaining an overall monetarist strategy but making significant U-turns, and appearing to concede on some human rights issues. The media, including the right-wing *El Mercurio*, and state institutions like the Supreme Court, began to take a more independent, critical line. Speculation about Pinochet's end became rife, and manoeuvres to find a way out of the crisis without letting the Left near the reigns of power took place, involving the US ambassador, Nationalist and Christian Democrat politicians and businessmen.

1983 began with the longest and most bitter strike since the coup against a French-owned firm building a hydro-electric plant. The workers and their families set up a camp at the gates, to stop strike-breakers. The dispute became a symbol of resistance throughout Chile, and support flowed from unions and communities all over the country, much of it channelled through the church. Finally, in March, the strikers won most of their demands. It was a victory that inspired a fresh surge of protest. A series of mass, nationwide protest days began on March 24. These were followed by more on May 1, May 11, June 14 and July 12, each one broader than before. An important aspect of these days has been the adoption of forms of action that enabled everyone to join in. Boycotts of schools, shops and public transport; extinguishing lights at 8pm; and, most impressively, the beating of pots and pans at the same time. Eye and ear witnesses described the amazing effect, as darkness and din spread from shanty towns and working class districts to middle and upper class suburbs. Hundreds of thousands, if not millions, took part. Police and troops were used to attack barricades erected by youths in shanty towns, but in places they failed to drive back the crowds.

By July, the talk in Chile was not about whether Pinochet would go, but about when and how. Prominent Christian Democrat exiles were allowed back in while others were arrested for involvement with the protests. The army still seemed mainly loyal to Pinochet, but there were reports of dissident documents circulating in the officer corps; and the use of the army against demonstrations on July 12 — for the first time since the coup itself — may accelerate discontent. Some suggest a military government without Pinochet; others, a joint military-civilian government. In either case, the economic desperation of many makes it difficult to see how the pressure for full democracy can be resisted for long.

Mrs Thatcher has supported General Pinochet as an anti-communist and monetarist since 1979. In 1982 he became also a covert ally against Argentina. In return the junta has received military, economic and political aid. Only last June, Navy Chief Admiral Merino was in London for talks about buying HMS Hermes. The events planned for September by the Chile Solidarity Campaign can help cut this lifeline to the isolated junta. *Quentin Given*

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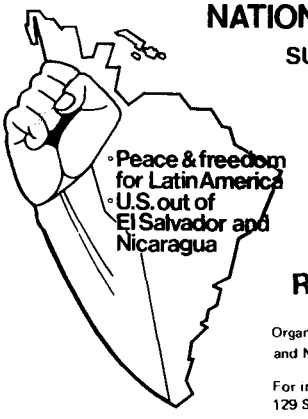

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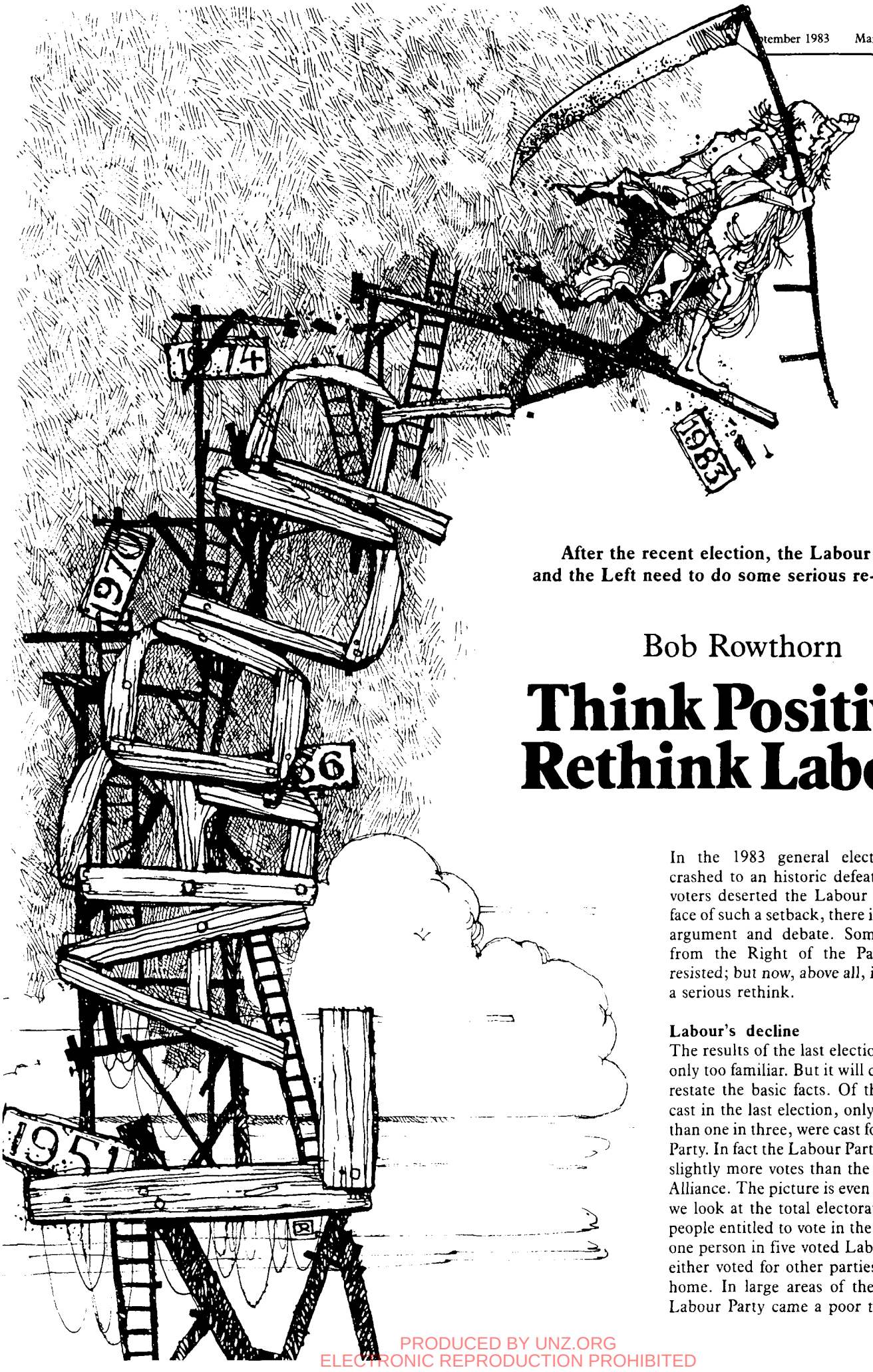

After the recent election, the Labour Party and the Left need to do some serious re-thinking.

Bob Rowthorn

Think Positive– Rethink Labour

In the 1983 general election, Labour crashed to an historic defeat. Millions of voters deserted the Labour Party. In the face of such a setback, there is bound to be argument and debate. Some arguments from the Right of the Party must be resisted; but now, above all, is the time for a serious rethink.

Labour's decline

The results of the last election are by now only too familiar. But it will do no harm to restate the basic facts. Of the total votes cast in the last election, only 29%, or less than one in three, were cast for the Labour Party. In fact the Labour Party gained only slightly more votes than the Liberal-SDP Alliance. The picture is even more bleak if we look at the total electorate. Of all the people entitled to vote in the election only one person in five voted Labour. The rest either voted for other parties or stayed at home. In large areas of the country the Labour Party came a poor third, trailing

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well behind the Alliance and the Tories. Outside Greater London, the Labour Party won only three seats in the whole of Southern England — in Thurrock, Bristol South and Ipswich. Labour performed better elsewhere in Britain, but even in its strongholds in Scotland, Wales and the North, support for the party was well below the level achieved in the previous election of 1979. In few of these strongholds did Labour win more than half the votes cast and in almost every case the Liberal/SDP alliance did quite well. Thus, Labour has been driven into third place in the South and has lost ground heavily to the Alliance throughout the whole country.

The picture is equally gloomy if we look at the social composition of Labour's vote. Amongst manual workers of almost every kind there has been a huge swing to the Alliance; amongst trade unionists support for Labour has slumped dramatically: out of every 10 trade unionists who took part in the election — and many did not — only 4 cast their vote for Labour and the remaining 6 voted for other parties. Amongst young people, taking part in their first election, Labour received less votes than either the Tories or the Alliance. This represents a dramatic shift compared to the previous election, when Labour was easily the most popular party amongst first time voters. Even amongst the unemployed, Labour received only 44% of the votes cast — considerably more than any of the other parties, but short of an absolute majority.

So, no matter how you look at it, Labour has suffered a disastrous defeat. How did this defeat occur? A lot of explanations have been offered by the Left. Standard scapegoats are the press and the rest of the media, which for the most part have been hostile and grossly unfair to the Labour Party. Others have blamed the Party's election manifesto — that it was badly put together, that it was too left wing, or too right wing. Some point to the inadequacies of Michael Foot as a leader; others blame the Party itself for being divided. Another target are the Social Democrats who are blamed for being splitters. Thus, the Left of the Labour Party blames the Right, the Right blames the Left. And together they blame the media and the Social Democrats.

There is some truth in all these claims, but such explanations miss the true dimensions of the problem. Labour's recent defeat is not something which has occurred overnight. It is merely the latest and most dramatic episode in the long history of Labour's decline; a decline which has been occurring for some thirty years during which Labour's electoral support has been falling almost continuously and the Party has become even more divorced from the people it aspires to represent.

Let us examine this decline. In almost every general election since 1951, the proportion of the adult population voting Labour has fallen in comparison with the previous election. Either Labour's supporters have failed to turn out or else they have transferred their allegiance to other parties.

the movement displays a tendency to speak and listen only to itself

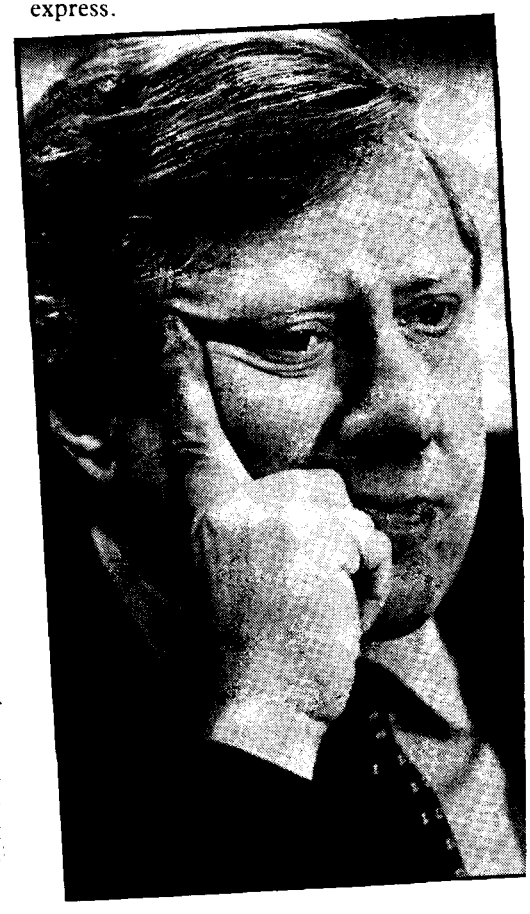
The one exception was 1966 when Labour staged a brief recovery, only to see its vote fall again at the next election. This long-term decline in Labour's electoral support has been disguised by the peculiarities of Britain's 'first past the post' electoral system. Under this system, a party can sometimes win a huge majority of seats in Parliament even though it receives a minority of the votes cast. In 1966, for example, Labour won a landslide majority over the Tories, whilst receiving only 47.9% of the total votes cast. And in February 1974 the result was even more bizarre. The Labour Party won this election and threw out the government of Edward Heath, even though its share of the vote was well below the level achieved in the previous election of 1970, which Labour had lost.

The examples illustrate how, for so long, the British electoral system has concealed what is really happening to Labour Party support. Popular support for the Party has been declining especially amongst manual workers, for around thirty years. But because of our peculiar electoral system, Labour has continued to win elections from time to time and to form governments; thus preserving the illusion that the Labour Party is fundamentally sound and nothing much has really changed. The recent election has shattered this illusion and revealed for the first time the true extent of Labour's decline. Even the most blinkered can no longer ignore it.

Cultural problems

Now, for those with a wider perspective, Labour's decline has been visible for many years. There have been numerous signs of the Party's growing weakness. One obvious sign is what has happened in the cultural sphere. Socialist ideas, values and institutions have been in retreat — amongst working people — for several decades. One example of this is the decline of Labour clubs, which used to be major political and social centres in traditional Labour areas. In other regions, like the South, these clubs were always much weaker: now they are almost invisible and nothing has replaced them. A related example is the decline of the co-operative movement. And look at what's happened to the press. *Reynold's News*, the *Sunday Citizen* and the *Daily Herald* have sunk without trace and on a *mass* scale nothing has replaced them. The growing Tory bias of the press is not just a contributory factor to the election result, it is also an expression of Labour's long term political and cultural decline.

Finally, the Labour Party, and the labour movement more generally, has failed to develop new forms of communications with the people and change with the times. Its use of existing or potential opportunities on TV and radio remains all too often reluctant and amateurish. By and large the Labour Party has supported the state monopoly of TV and radio, grudgingly acquiescing in the development of the commercial networks, but never promoting a more democratic pluralism in TV and radio. What, for example, about a trade union-sponsored TV channel or radio station? The labour movement has grossly underestimated the new mass media and the new types of working class culture they express.



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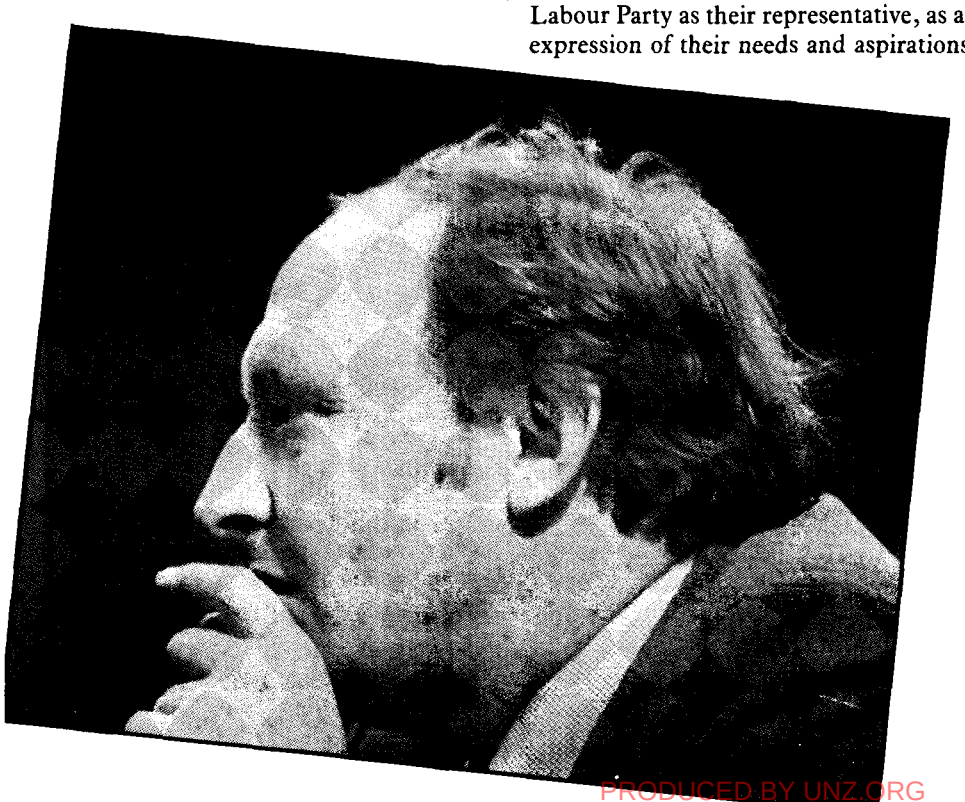
A second index of Labour's decline has been the drastic fall in active working class involvement in the Party. Over much of the country manual and white collar workers in industry no longer play a significant role in Labour Party affairs. And the Party is increasingly dominated, especially in the South, by public sector professionals; that is to say, teachers of all varieties — university teachers, polytechnic teachers and school teachers — together with social workers, local government officers and other functionaries of the welfare state. Such people, one suspects, now provide the bulk of active members in the modern Labour Party. In other words, Labour activists have become increasingly unrepresentative of Labour's actual or potential electorate.

Few ordinary trade unionists take an active part in Labour Party affairs. This has been disguised by the fact that the trade unions exercise considerable power within the Labour Party because of the money they provide and the block votes they wield at conference. But the truth is that the vast majority of trade unionists who belong to unions affiliated to the Labour Party, pay the levy and vote Labour are not active within the party.

Another index of Labour's decline is the party's loss of contact with ordinary people, with their needs, aspirations and forms of expression. Within the Labour Party, and within many other institutions of the labour movement for that matter, there is often a marked unwillingness to listen to what is said by people who are not themselves committed socialists. Many activists will not listen to critics from outside the labour movement. And within the Labour Party, and to some extent within the labour movement as a whole, there is a very enclosed hermetic atmosphere. A large section of the movement displays a strong tendency to speak and listen only to itself, using a private language which is almost meaningless to those outside. Many activists are far too insulated from outside forces and and influences. This shows itself in a variety of ways. One expression is the exaggerated hostility to the press which characterises both left and right of the Party. Another example is the attitude towards public opinion polls. What you hear time and time again on the Left is that public opinion polls are at best misleading and irrelevant and at worst propaganda. On the contrary, they are, as a rule, only too accurate and in ignoring them, we have paid the price.

To sum up. The Labour Party — in a variety of ways and for a variety of reasons — has increasingly lost contact with the people it aspires to represent. Its view of culture and communications remains stuck in the 1940s. Its cadre force has become less and less representative of the working class. And its own culture, language and style has become increasingly insulated from the world outside. The Labour Party has lost touch. As a consequence, large sections of the people — including many former Labour voters — no longer see the Labour Party as their representative, as an expression of their needs and aspirations.



Thatcherism and the new consensus

The long decline of the Labour Party is the backdrop to Thatcherism. Labour's falling electoral support, its growing separation from the people and the lack of reforming zeal exhibited by Labour governments have all left the party vulnerable to attack from the Right, by Mrs Thatcher and her cohorts. Labour's decline predated and contributed towards the rise of Thatcherism and the new Right. But the Thatcherites have exploited this decline and greatly intensified it.

The Thatcherite objective has been to destroy the postwar consensus and redefine the terms of the political debate. Central to this has been an ideological offensive designed to shift popular attitudes and assumptions. Up to a point this has been remarkably successful: there has been a sea-change in public opinion which can by no means be measured simply in terms of the Tory vote. In the eyes of many, mass unemployment has become an unpleasant but necessary medicine; privatisation is seen as a legitimate or even desirable course of action in both the public sector and the welfare state; the trade unions are more isolated than at any time since the war. The old consensus has been effectively destroyed. And Labour has been the major victim for two reasons. Firstly, Labour — in 1945 — had been the architect of this consensus. Its strategy and reforms were the basis of the postwar consensus which all governments — Labour and Conservative — by and large respected. Secondly, the Thatcherite attack is an offensive aimed at, and gaining much support from, a working class, large sections of which are disillusioned with the old Labour politics.

Labour has suffered a disastrous defeat

It would be wrong, however, to exaggerate how far the Tories have so far succeeded in their objectives — or underestimate what the scale of their project is. Destroying the postwar consensus is about shifting the terms of the debate, but it is about much more. It involves destroying or recasting the institutions of the old consensus and reshaping society and the economy in a new Thatcherite image. The Tories are still a long way from achieving this. There is still, as the election campaign revealed, much support amongst the people, for example, for the NHS. And the Tories have made little progress in reshaping the health service in the direction they would like to see. Thatcherism Part II will

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be about consolidating ideological support *and* reshaping such institutions as health care.

But the long-term aim of the Thatcherites is not merely to destroy the *old* consensus, reshape society and win support for themselves. It is to establish a *new* consensus of opinion, a consensus in which even their political opponents accept the basic tenets of their belief and share with them a common philosophy about how the economy and society should be organised. This is impossible so long as the Labour Party remains a significant force in British politics. The Labour Party will never accept the harsh individualism of the Thatcherite creed and its blatant promotion of inequality. So Labour must be eliminated or at least weakened to a point where it no longer matters. Such is the *logic* of Thatcherism (if not, at least until now, the declared objective). With Labour out of the way, the Liberal/SDP Alliance, or some variant of it, would become the main opposition party. In these circumstances, without a countervailing force from the Left, the Alliance would come under the Thatcherite gravitational pull, and it would move to the Right. The Alliance would become, in effect, the 'acceptable face of Thatcherism' — a term already used by some people to describe David Owen.

This is the danger which now confronts us. Labour stands on the edge of a precipice. If the Party suffers yet another serious decline in support, it could find itself driven into third place in the polls with all that implies under the existing electoral system. It could become the Liberal Party of the 60s and 70s. Under such circumstances, Labour's links with the unions would come under strong and probably irresistible pressure from union members. The organised labour movement could find itself on the margin of British politics. Such a prospect is not impossible. But it is certainly not inevitable. So how is it to be prevented? There are two separate but interrelated tasks: the first task is to revive the Labour Party and renew its links with the people. This will not be easy and will take considerable time. The second task is to rally all the various forces in Britain opposed to Mrs Thatcher and her policies, which are at present divided and confused. This is an urgent task which must begin immediately if the Thatcherites are to be prevented from consolidating their power.

> the party is increasingly dominated by public sector professionals

Renewal

Let us consider the first of these tasks: how to renew the Labour Party? Until now, most of the pressure for renewal has come from the left of the Party, which has fought a long campaign for new policies, new leaders and new procedures to make the leadership more accountable to the Party. These are fundamental preconditions for renewal. But they do not exhaust the problem. Indeed, there are other questions of equal importance which so far have been largely left off the agenda, although some of the recent responses to the election defeat are encouraging.[1] These concern, in particular, Labour's practice and its relationship with and attitude towards the people.

There is the question of style. Labour must listen to the people and learn from them. There has been much emphasis since the election on the need to get Labour's 'message' across more effectively. That is necessary. But the Party also needs

[1]For example, Robin Cook in the *Guardian*, 1 July, 1983.

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to be much more responsive to what the people think and feel. It must abandon many of its preconceptions and learn to see people as they really are, eschewing somewhat idealised stereotypes which can only mislead.

This is partly a matter of coming to terms with changes in the composition of the working class. The white-collar sections are of growing importance. But this is not the only problem. What is evident from the election is that Labour has lost a lot of voters amongst one of its oldest support groups, the skilled manual working class. Why? And how is Labour to rebuild its shattered support in the South? You can't solve problems like this by slogans or scapegoats — or even, on their own, good policies. Labour must rebuild itself as an outward-going responsive *movement* if it is to effect any serious change in that situation.

Labour must also develop a new cultural approach. It has long neglected cultural forms, yet historically the strength of Labourism was as much cultural as political. There are two main aspects to this problem. Firstly, the labour movement needs to develop a more professional, and less paranoiac attitude towards the established media — the press, TV, radio, and video. There is a great deal of discrimination. But there are also many opportunities to be taken culturally as well as politically, which require the mastering of journalistic skills and expertise. Secondly, the labour movement needs to develop and sponsor its own media. The recent proposal of the unions to set up a national daily paper is a welcome step in this direction. But we must be aware that resources are not the only pitfall. Such a paper, to be successful, would require real editorial imagination and independence. Past precedents are not always encouraging.

Labour and democracy

Then there is the question of democracy upon which Labour's record is, to say the least, patchy. Yet there lies one of the keys to Labour's recovery. Labour must in every way possible be a model of democracy, must embody in its own behaviour and attitudes, the democracy it preaches to others. There have been some advances in this direction but many problems remain. Take the unions, for example. When Michael Foot resigned as leader of the Labour Party, there was the most unfortunate maneouvering as various leaders and factions tried to commit their unions to the support of this candidate or that, with little regard whatsoever as to what their membership as a whole might think. It was not just a matter of Right or Left. Both were often as bad as each other. Fortunately there were a number of unions — like, for example, the National Union of Public

the Labour Party will never accept the harsh individualism of the Thatcherite creed

Employees which behaved in an exemplary fashion and from the very beginning decided to consult their membership before reaching a decision. If all unions behaved like this, the trade union movement would be a lot stronger than it is at present and so, too, would the Labour Party.

Of course, what happened in the leadership contest is only a symptom of a deeper problem. The unions provide the main link between the working class and the Labour Party. The most practical way to involve workers in the Labour Party is through their unions; and this can only be done if the unions themselves are able to achieve greater participation by their members in the affairs of the unions. Thus,

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Wed 21 Clifton Hall, Rotherham
Thu 22 Queens Road Centre, Halifax
Fri 23 Victoria Hall, Keighley
Sat 24 Royal Park School, Leeds
Tue 27 The Irish Centre, Middlesborough
Wed 28 Newcastle (Days of Hope)
Thu 29 Stanwix Arts Centre, Carlisle
Fri 30 Stanwix Arts Centre, Carlisle

October
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Tue 4 Solihull Technical College
Wed 5 Basford Coronation Club, Stoke
Thu 6 Sidney Stringer School, Coventry
Fri 7 Madeley Court Centre, Telford
Sat 8 Forest Community Centre, Walsall
Mon 10 Cheltenham Fringe Theatre (Festival)
Tue 11 Cheltenham Fringe Theatre (Festival)
Wed 12 Greenwich YPTS
Thu 13 Brighton Pavilion
Wed 19 Brewhouse, Taunton
Thu 20 Exeter University
Fri 21 Darlington College, Totnes
Sat 22 The Drum, Plymouth 3.00pm
Sat 22 The Drum, Plymouth 7.45pm
Thu 27 Jacksons Lane Community Centre
Fri 28 Cranford Community School
Sat 29 Chats Palace, Hackney
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the key to extending working class involvement in the Labour Party is a renewal of the the trade union movement itself.

So much for democracy within the Labour Party itself. But what about the outside world? What about Labour's approach to democracy in Britain as a whole? Here the record is mixed. In some areas, such as police accountability, freedom of information and the like, the Party has moved a long way from some of its old authoritarian views and now has quite a libertarian approach. But there is one area where its official policy is still as bad as ever. I am thinking, of course, about electoral reform. In the last election the Liberal/SDP alliance got 27% of the vote, only marginally less than Labour; yet it won virtually no seats in parliament. It is outrageous that a quarter of the population should be deprived of representation in this way. It is an affront to democracy. Yet Labour is still supporting the present electoral system which is responsible for such grave injustice. It is still opposed to proportional representation — the one system which would give the Alliance voters the parliamentary seats they deserve. Labour's refusal to support PR is quite indefensible. It makes a mockery of their claim to be the party of democracy and displays an extraordinary contempt for the rights of others. As a consequence, it is the Alliance which, since the election has led the campaign for PR. Labour has abdicated responsibility on one of the major democratic issues of the day.

Such an approach can do Labour nothing but harm and can only inhibit the process of renewal upon which the Party's long term future depends. Besides, there is also the obvious point that under PR the Tories would be now in a minority in Parliament and Mrs Thatcher would almost certainly not be Prime Minister. However, the question is not primarily one of expediency, but of democratic principles and respect for others.

Labour's attitude towards PR is symptomatic of a wider problem. The Labour Party often thinks of itself as the centre of the political universe, the very embodiment of all that is good and decent in British society. It finds it very difficult to respect the independence or legitimacy of other political and social forces. Towards the Left, it takes the totalitarian attitude that anything which is left-wing should belong to the Labour Party; hence the strange idea sometimes put forward that independent movements such as CND and the women's movement should affiliate to the Labour Party. Moreover, Labour finds it difficult to accept that other parties, to its right, such as the Liberals and, dare I say it, the SDP, may contain within them positive elements and may even on occasion have policies which are more 'left-wing' than those of Labour itself. A case in point being the Liberals' policy on official secrets which for years was far superior to the authoritarian policy of the Labour Party, or at least the practice of Labour governments. Such attitudes are a product of the old two-party system. They are now out of date and, if Labour is to renew itself in the coming epoch, the Party must adopt a pluralistic approach and learn to work with a wider range of forces than it has in the past.

the Labour Party often thinks of itself as the centre of the political universe

This is not a call for coalition government or parliamentary deals as some suggest. They are missing the point. It concerns attitudes towards extra-parliamentary activities, to broad movements, other parties and institutions. One aspect of such a more tolerant and realistic approach includes the Labour Party's attitudes towards the Communist Party. Pluralism includes political pluralism on the Left — and a recognition not only of the existence, but of the distinct contribution of the Communist Party and its programme, the British Road to Socialism. In a sense this has already begun to happen. There has long been a respect for the work of Communists in trade unions and the role of the *Morning Star;* more recently there has been a growing appreciation of the strategic thinking of the Communist Party and the work of *Marxism Today*. But such recognition is often piecemeal — and is still generally accompanied by the retort 'but if only you were in the Labour Party . . .'

Problems of strategy

This brings us to the question of policies and programmes. What does Labour stand for? Clause IV of the Party Constitution states that Labour is committed to collective ownership of the means of production, distribution and exchange. Those who say that Labour must modernise itself often go on to say that clause IV should be abandoned, that Labour should accept the so-called mixed economy in perpetuity, an economy in which the bulk of economic life is controlled by private capitalists, by great multinational firms and banks. This in my view is wrong. It is certainly true that public ownership is not at present very popular and that a programme of wholesale nationalisation would be electoral suicide for Labour. But this does not alter the fact that the traditional goals of socialism — economic

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security and social justice — cannot be fully achieved in a capitalist economy, and that so long as giant multinationals and the like dominate our country, the prosperity of our people and the gains they have already achieved or will achieve in the future will never be secure. So clause IV must stay and the Labour Party must remain committed to the eventual takeover of big business, to be administered, of course, in some new and more democratic way than in the past.

But, having said that must be Labour's strategic goal, it is essential to distinguish between strategy and tactics. You don't put all your long term objectives in your immediate programme or next manifesto. Being 'left wing' cannot be reduced to how left wing your immediate policies or programmes are: it is also about strategy and your ability to influence and interact with the people.

The Left aspires to become the dominant force in the Labour Party. But this is not enough. The Left must also show itself capable of retaining and rebuilding Labour's electoral and popular support. All this in turn requires a much clearer sense of strategy than the Left has so far displayed. Making Labour into an effective socialist party is not, as many seem to think, about forcing ever more radical commitments into the Party's election manifesto. Rather, it is about conceiving a line of strategic advance for the Party, conceiving of politics as a *process* of change. In such a process, Labour's policy and practice must appeal to millions who are not yet committed socialists. Here the Labour Party has much to learn from the Italian Communist Party. It is not clear, at the moment, how such strategic thinking can be introduced into the mainstream of the Party's political life. The need, however, is urgent.

This is linked to a wider question which the Left in general has understandably tended to avoid. The disintegration of the 1945 model/aspiration has left the Labour Party without a clear idea of where it wants to go. This problem is not unique to the Labour Party. The European-wide malaise of the social-democratic model — together with the general rejection by the Left of the Soviet model — has created a crisis of vision. To some degree, this has been obscured by the growth and elaboration of left policies over the last decade. But this cannot substitute for a clearer notion of where we want to go and what kind of society we want to construct. Frequently this question is answered by reference to the past, to socialist traditions. These are important, but they don't answer the question. We need to look forwards. There are now a host of issues concerning the future that socialists need to confront — the state and unemployment and work. Thatcherism has been successful more as a set of values, principles and objectives, than as a list of policies. The Left has something to learn from this.

A Broad alliance

Such a renewal can throw back the onslaught of Thatcherism. It is not the task of the Labour Party alone, but of all the Left, in the trade unions, the Communist Party, and in the various democratic movements. It will also take time. A decline of three decades cannot be reversed in a couple of years. So what, apart from embarking on this process, must be seen as the priority of the next 4-5 years? We are faced with a Conservative government, enjoying an enormous majority, determined to pursue an even more right wing trajectory. The objective will be further to undermine the welfare state and the trade unions, and consolidate Thatcherite ideas and values: if successful, Labour will be further isolated and a new Thatcherite consensus will look very much on the cards.

> **the British electoral system has concealed what is really happening to Labour Party support**

The task of the Left in this situation is not simply to pose Labour's policies against those of the Tories. It is much wider. It must do something that so far we have by and large failed to do: we must begin to isolate the Thatcherites and concert the anti-Thatcherite forces in society. The basis for this is evident from the general election. Of those that voted, only 2 out of 5 opted for the Tories. But two conditions are necessary for such an approach. Firstly, the Left must recognise that the Thatcherites are a qualitatively greater threat to both Britain and the labour movement than, for example, the Alliance. In other words, they are far and away the greatest danger. So far, the labour movement has for the most part failed to understand Thatcherism and therefore the quite different threat it poses. Secondly, drawing together the anti-Thatcherite forces cannot be reduced to a party question. It is not a matter of persuading everyone to vote Labour — or Communist — at the next election, though we might wish this was the case. Rather, the labour movement must seek to engage in action and dialogue with forces outside its own ranks — above all on the key issues of the day such as unemployment, Cruise and Trident, the health service and civil liberties. On these questions, much support can be won amongst Alliance and even some Conservative voters. The problem is to build a new progressive coalition of opinion amongst the people against the Thatcherites, even if for the moment that inevitably assumes a somewhat defensive character. It is precisely such a broad swathe of opinion that lies behind the success of CND whose support extends well beyond the Labour Party to include Liberal, SDP, SNP, Plaid and even some Tory voters.

This requires a much less sectarian and narrowly electoralist conception of politics than tends to predominate in much Labour thinking. Campaigns and debates should consciously seek to involve others including those active in the peace and the women's movement, religious people, or members of the Liberal/SDP Alliance. The labour movement must become the focus of a broad anti-Thatcherite movement involving many who are not at present Labour voters, and some who are never likely to become so.

The effect of such a broad popular movement, if successful, would be manifold. It would begin to isolate the Thatcherites and thereby prise from them the political initiative they have enjoyed over the last few years. It would help to prevent the Alliance from drifting in the Thatcherite direction, and strengthen the hand of the more progressive elements within the Alliance. It would enhance the status and standing of the labour movement — the Labour Party, the trade unions and the Communist Party — amongst a much wider range of people. And finally, it would broaden the horizons of the labour movement itself, giving it a new range of contacts and a new and more open style of action and language. This in itself would contribute to the renewal of the Labour Party which we have just discussed.

The Labour Party faces the most serious crisis in its history — and so, inevitably, does the Left as a whole. However, the continued decline of the Labour Party is not irreversible. The Party can survive and prosper. But to do so it must see the causes of its decline in a much broader way than has so far been the case. Being Left is not just about leaders, policies and internal accountability. It is equally about forms of behaviour, democracy, struggle and strategy. □

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The Tories are encouraging a trend towards owner-occupation. How should the Left respond?

Ray Forrest

Home Sweet Home

When the Thatcher government came to power in 1979 it was committed to a renewed drive to extend home ownership and a reduced role for public housing. Under the populist slogan of a 'property owning democracy' council house purchase became a statutory right rather than a discretionary policy available to local councils to implement as appropriate. The privately rented sector was to be revived through a reduction in controls over rent levels and security of tenure provisions. New forms of private renting were to be encouraged offering a market rate of return. Various other schemes to enable low cost purchase were to be introduced.

These manifesto commitments were embodied in the Housing Act, 1980 which signalled a transformation in the direction of postwar housing policy. The parallel expansion of home ownership and council housing was to come to an end. Moreover, disinvestment in the public housing sector was to be in the forefront of policies to reduce levels of public expenditure. For the Tory Party, council housing was the dominant symbol of a creeping welfarism which was stifling private investment and undermining competitive individualism.

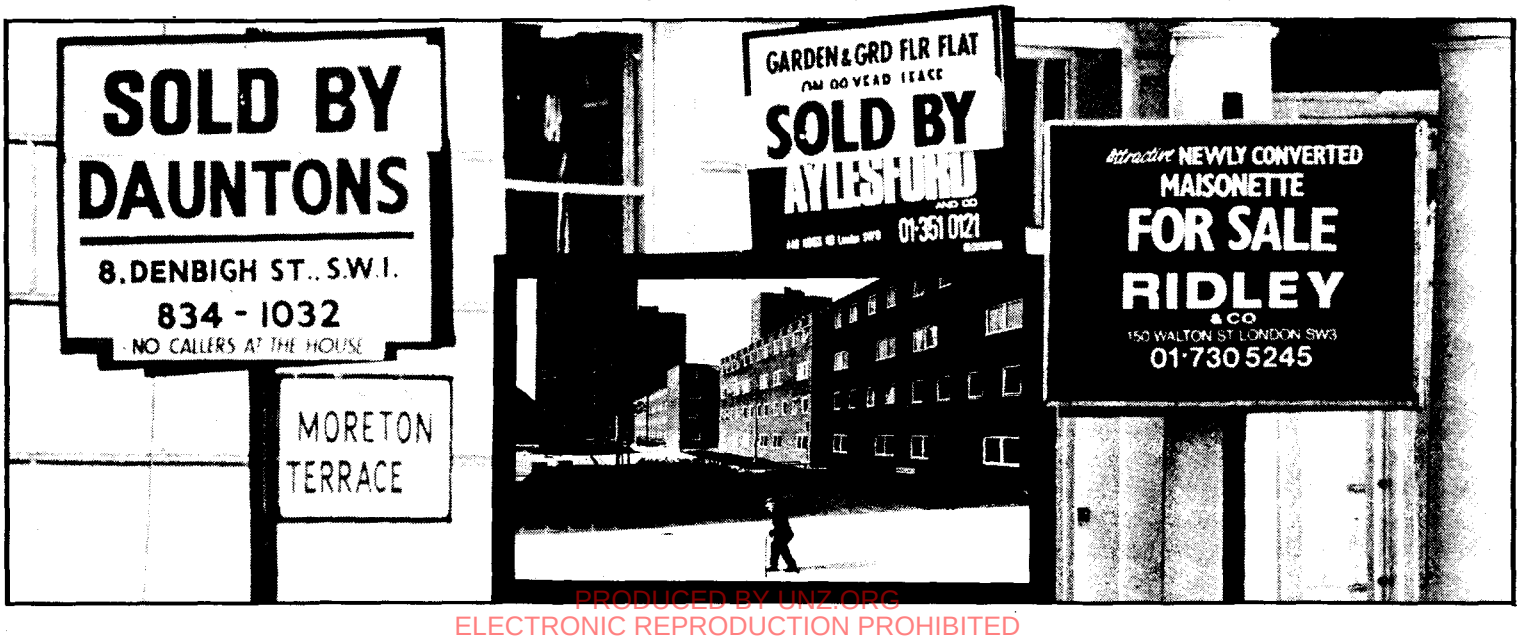
But what has actually happened to the structure of the housing market and the nature of housing opportunities over the last few years? Official statistics show that in Great Britain in 1979 52% of households were in owner occupation, 34% in council housing and the remainder in housing association or private tenancies. In 1983 a reasonable estimate would show 58% of households as house owners and a reduction of 4-5% in the proportion of households in the council sector. The privately rented sector has continued its historical decline to around 11% and there has been a marginal increase in housing association tenancies. On the surface these figures suggest only limited changes and hardly represent the social revolution we might have expected. These bald statistics do, however, conceal quite profound changes in the structure of housing investment, the nature of subsidies and the pattern of benefits and incentives. There is an inevitable time lag between policy change and the observable consequences. These consequences are only beginning to filter through.

Sale of council houses

The most significant development over the last four years has been the contraction of council housing in both absolute and relative terms. In the first three months of 1982 local authorities in England sold 138,800 dwellings — 2.9% of the council stock at 1 April 1982. Since May 1979 nearly 500,000 council houses have been sold in Great Britain. In the past, sales of dwellings have always been balanced by new acquisitions from the private sector and new building. This is no longer the case. By the end of 1982 there were 150,000 fewer council dwellings available to rent compared with when the 1980 Housing Act came into force — and that reduction was almost exclusively of more desirable two and three bedroomed houses with gardens.

Indeed, council house sales has represented a major element in the Government's privatisation strategy whether measured by cash receipts, value of sales, or the number of households directly affected. In many areas sales are now the prime factor in the expansion of home ownership. Overall, a reasonable forecast of the impact of trends in new building, sales and acquisitions would indicate that by 1986 some 64% of households in England will be owner occupiers. Council housing will cater for less than a quarter of all households. In the context of other European countries this is still a large public sector but its form and functions are likely to be very different. We will have one of the highest house ownership rates in Europe and a relatively small rental sector. In this sense we are seeing the creation of a more rigid tenure structure with very few opportunities to rent publicly or privately than exists in many other countries.

What lies behind these developments? Despite murmurings to the contrary we have seen no changes in the structure of



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mortgage interest tax relief. But local authority finance has been more tightly controlled involving an enormous reduction in subsidies and a steep increase in rents. Between 1979 and 1982 average rents paid by council tenants rose by more than twice the rate of inflation. Meanwhile, falling interest rates, stable house prices and the tax and capital gains advantages of home ownership have made purchase for tenants and others a progressively more attractive proposition.

The notion of the council tenants as a subsidised drain on public finances remains a dominant image. Yet the incentives associated with council house sales have formed part of a general shift in subsidy towards owner occupation. The most recent figures suggest that the average owner with a mortgage benefits to the tune of £370 per household as against £142 for council tenants. There may be an endless and rather tedious debate about what does or does not constitute a subsidy. But what is indisputable is that the notion of a private housing sector is more mythical that ever. Massive state finance is now being pumped into repairing and maintaining private sector dwellings. And discounts on council house sales, ranging from 33 to 50% of valuation, have been a new and substantial subsidy to the owner occupied sector. Department of the Environment figures indicate that by December 1982 262,000 dwellings had been sold under the Right to Buy at an average discount of £6,800 per dwelling. This could be represented as a loss to the ratepayer of £1,782 million.

Decline in housebuilding

And the combined effects of cuts in capital expenditure, rent rises, capital receipts from sales and reductions in rate fund subsidy have meant that the vast majority of local authorities are no longer receiving general exchequer assistance towards their housing revenue account. In fact we are now making a national profit on the housing revenue account of £55 million — so much for the subsidised public sector. Tax relief alone on owner occupied housing cost £2,150 million in 1982/3.

In the context of general expenditure, under Thatcher's government public investment in housing has declined from a major to a minor programme and the view that housing is a service which can in the main be provided by the private sector has made substantial impact. The public expenditure White Paper published in February 1983 showed the housing share to have fallen to 3% in 1980/81 and the planned share for 1985/6 as just over 2%.

In 1981 the number of new local authority dwellings completed was the lowest since 1926 with the exception of the war years and the private sector has not filled the gap. Private housing completions in 1981 were the lowest since 1954. Whilst there has been a vigorous drive to expand investment in improvement, by the mid 1980s the cumulative shortfall in new construction (of some half a million dwellings) will be significant.

It is this lack of investment as much as overt policies such as council house sales which is having a significant impact on the housing sector. And it is the regressive structure of housing finance and the reorientation of subsidy towards owner occupation which is at the heart of current changes. What is presented as the fulfillment of innate desires for property ownership is more appropriately seen as the product of 'political tenure strategies'. At present, the dice are heavily loaded in one direction. Whilst the wealthier owner occupier enjoys a range of benefits those at the bottom of the pile face harsher means testing and less generous subsidy for services which are declining in quality and quantity.

council housing increasingly serves a vulnerable and marginalised population

A marginalised group

Alongside these developments in housing finance and investment are broader social changes which are perhaps of greater significance. There is a strengthening of the relationship between unemployment, low wages, supplementary benefit recipients and those who occupy council housing. Council housing increasingly serves a vulnerable and marginalised population with a highly differentiated and stratified owner occupation for the mass tenure. This developing role for council housing, reflecting a view that it is for those who cannot do any better, is not the product of Thatcher's government alone. Nor is the view that council housing should be a residual service exclusively connected with the Right. The oppressive paternalism and bureaucracy of council housing has reflected precisely this attitude among both local Labour and Tory administrations. But paternalism is fast becoming welfare authoritarianism and the pace of this change is more marked and more consistent, particularly in the context of an ever increasing marginal population.

The current direction of policy is to enable these who can prosper in the private market to do so. These who are left in council housing and parts of the privately rented sector — the elderly, the unemployed, the low paid, single mothers — are economically marginalised and politically marginalised from the normal channels of political expression, namely trade unionism.

We could thus begin to see changes in management style, the quality of the stock or level of subsidy as symptoms of this powerlessness. Put crudely, where services cater for the elderly working class and others not seen as a productive resource, whose interests are served by providing more than a minimal level of service? Increased rents and means testing, council house sales, reductions in public expenditure and subsidy in that part of the housing market are logical responses to a situation where those affected are unable to respond to increases in cost through wage demands or political action.

Furthermore the extent to which tenants have a common interest in opposing increasing rents and demanding improved quality of service is potentially undermined by opportunities for the more affluent to escape these impacts through exercising their right to buy.

Hierarchy within owner occupation

But our concerns with a marginalised group who are increasingly concentrated in public housing should not obscure the hierarchy of house conditions and opportunities within owner occupation. One of the weakness of the Left's position, particularly in relation to its opposition to sales, has been to ignore broader questions of inequality which cut across all tenures. The Tories have successfully presented home ownership as a game we can all play. But some frequent the chic boutiques and some shop at the cheapest supermarkets. John Stanley as Minister of Housing in Thatcher's first administration, stated that he wished to see 80% of households as home owners. But there are areas in the north of England which already have this level of home ownership. They are characterised by static or falling house prices, high levels of disrepair and high unemployment: they are certainly not bastions of middle class affluence. Home ownership is characterised by substantial inequalities between groups and between areas and those inequalities find new expression through council house sales.

What is presented as universal and equitable compensation for years of wasted

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rental payments is in fact more of a lottery. The dwelling you occupy and where you happen to be tenant determines the value of the prize. In a high price area such as the outer London borough of Hounslow, a 50% discount on market valuation can represent over £20,000 whereas in somewhere like Liverpool it may be less than £7,000. Expressed differently, three years tenancy in one area can be worth more than twenty years tenancy somewhere else. It might be argued that in real terms these differences are not significant. The relative costs of purchasing another property in the same area will absorb the variations in the value of the discounts. But much of the Tory argument rests on questions of inheritance. Clearly it is the most affluent tenants in the most affluent areas who are reaping the greatest rewards. It is their children who will enjoy the largest inheritance.

A perspective

It is these sorts of considerations which can take us beyond the defence of collective provision expressed crudely as a resistance to sales. Local variations in relation to the quality of dwellings, the relative costs of owning and renting and the meaning of particular tenures are significant. For example, the upward movement of rents, falling interest rates and generous discounts has produced a situation where the day to day costs of owning are often less than the cost of renting. This is particularly the case in the most depressed areas where valuations are low. This may encourage some tenants to buy a property which has little or no resale value simply because of calculations about relatively weekly costs.

In some areas the dominant reality of council housing is of inner urban high rise. In others it is predominantly houses with gardens of a quality superior to much of the owner occupied stock. The asset stripping effects of sales have a marked spatial dimension. The image and reality of home ownership is equally varied.

The general effect of Thatcher's housing policy has been to reassert the relationships between income levels and housing standards and opportunities. We cannot divorce housing issues from the uneven impact of the recession. Current trends in housing exacerbate and reflect the new geography of inequality. If we exclude inner London the benefits on offer have a strong north-south dimension.

As socialists where does this take us as regards an appropriate strategy? It is clearly futile to offer a simple defence of council housing in the current environment where the choice for many individuals is between rising rents or highly subsidised purchase. Moreover, many commentators have been forced into a position of defending council housing as a matter of principle when previously they had spent years criticising its paternalism and excessive bureaucracy. It may be more appropriate to focus on inequalities which cut across all tenures. Ironically the complete absorption of council housing into owner occupation would expose the discrepancies between the ideological promise and the material reality. It is inequalities which are being shaped and not class positions which are being transformed.

Transcending the current distortions and inequalities in the housing sector is dependent on changing the structure of subsidies and in particular the regressive effects of tax relief on mortgage interest. From there we might look towards new forms of co-operatives, greater participation and less bureaucracy in the public sector. But it is essential to move beyond a narrow concern with public housing. If council housing is in transition so too is owner-occupation. But this is a subject that the Left has so far sadly neglected. □

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On the eve of the 1983 TUC, six trade union activists discuss the problems facing the labour movement.

For whom the Block Votes?

A roundtable discussion on politics and trade unions

The participants in this roundtable discussion are: Pete Carter (National Industrial Organiser of the Communist Party); Dan Connor (Convenor of the Ford Body Plant, Dagenham); Judith Crabtree (a member of the National Executive Council of NALGO); Jack Dromey (Public Services National Officer of the TGWU); Sandra Horne (Equality Officer of the ACTT); and Bob Wright (Assistant General Secretary of the AUEW (engineering)). The discussion is chaired by Sam Aaronovitch. All participate in their personal capacity.

What do you see as the longer term aims of the Tory government in relation to the unions. Do they simply want to weaken and repress trade unions, or do they want to turn the unions into different types of bodies, perhaps the business style unionism of Japan or the United States?

Dan I don't think there's any hope in the current world of repressing trade unions. I think it would be a vain hope to repress the unions, short of fascist state regulation. It's more a question of reshaping them, of having in-house talking shops dealing with a particular industry.

Jack Tebbit once said he wanted to 'neuter the trade union movement' not destroy it. I think Dan's right. What they're trying to do is two things; first, weaken the power of the trade union movement, in particular the power to take effective action against the employer or indeed against government; and secondly, change the political nature of trade unionism in Britain and in particular to weaken the historic political link between the trade union movement and the Labour Party. And they've learnt the lessons of history; it's no longer the grand slam of the Industrial Relations Act, but a number of measures, one after the other, with the ideological ground carefully prepared on each occasion. On another level, they have sought to drive a wedge into the trade union movement between the leadership in a broad sense, the activists, and the rank and file. The Government are much cleverer than many within the trade union movement have thus far appreciated. There's been a tendency to depict Thatcher and Tebbit simply as crude hatchet persons out for our jugular. I think there are signs that the Government, having kicked us hard, is now, in an attempt to change the political nature of the trade union movement, going to open the door very slightly, and readmit the trade union movement to the corridors of power. But on their terms.

Judith Yes, I think it's very much divide and rule. I don't just mean union against union but there's an attempt to move us towards in-house sweetheart unions. Think of the breakdown of national bargaining: it's already happened in the iron and steel trade, it's happening in the water industry with the abolition of the National Water Council and I can see that trend spreading so that instead of having the national bargaining unit, and the national power behind it, you're going back to plant bargaining, which is fine *if* you've got a big strong plant with a big strong membership in it.

Bob I don't think the Tory approach to the trade unions is a sophisticated one: they haven't evolved a long term strategy. What the Tories are really doing is to exploit such longer-term developments as the changing structure of the workforce, the spread of home ownership and the long campaign against the unions in which the press have played a big role. Then, of course, there's the element of fear, unemployment.

Pete I'd just like to marginally disagree with Bob and identify with Jack on this question of strategy. The last two decades have produced some incredible trade union activities and struggles. We've seen the development of left policies within trade unions and the TUC. There's also been quite a shift in a lot of unions in terms of their leaderships. After the Heath defeat, however, the Tories worked out a complete new strategy to change all that. The Government has been very clever. Jack talked about a wedge. First, they have sought to change the climate of opinion — on unemployment, the welfare state, the power of the unions and so on. And when they have moved, they have done so where the trade unions are most vulnerable in the present climate: for example the election of trade union officials to governing bodies and the political activities of trade unions and ballots before strikes. To argue on the factory floor against the things that Tebbit is saying is going to be one almighty job, because they have conditioned the working class in their favour, and they've timed this piece of legislation based on that conditioning.

Sandra This government has a very clear objective and that is to neuter, to repress the trade unions. If there is a strategy involved it is merely to disguise that crude aim for as long as possible, because if it was expressed as a crude aim and we could get that crude aim over on the shopfloor, then there would be a lot more resistance than there is at the moment. So they disguise it by talking about democratising the trade unions, whereas we know that if rampaging postal ballots throughout the length and breadth of the country produced astonishing left wing leaderships, all of a sudden democracy would go out of fashion.

You are probably familiar with the situation in the general election where a majority of trade unionists voted Conservative and Alliance rather than Labour. This suggests that quite important political changes are taking place. Why has that shift taken place? And what are the underlying trends that have produced it?

Sandra I would like to put two very simple points. Firstly, when there is such high unemployment I think very often people will be inclined to vote for the status quo if they are actually in work because to vote for anything else perhaps runs the risk of they themselves losing their jobs. Secondly, many trade unionists

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Sandra Horne

looked at their own organisations, at the way their unions were run (and this is nothing to do with whether people are elected by postal vote or not) and felt that that particular world did not represent a model of society that they would be attracted to. I think people are entitled to look at the Labour Party and the trade union movement and say 'all right, you're holding up a vision of a brave new society with hope and opportunity for everybody, but we look at you and don't necessarily see that created within your own ranks'. I think there were a lot of people who believed in what the labour movement was offering in the election, but felt either the movement as a whole would be incapable of delivering it or were persuaded that in fact those objectives were not legitimate.

Dan I'm surprised you ask, Sam, why so many trade unionists did not vote Labour. People join trade unions to improve their lot in the particular job they occupy. They certainly don't necessarily have any grandiose political aims. We assume that because a person is a trade unionist they therefore share our views of socialism and society. That doesn't follow at all. That may have been true pre-war when people found that the gratification of their aims — full employment, better education and so on — could only be fulfilled by a change of government. That doesn't necessarily follow since the late 40s does it? People see the joining of a trade union as being an end in itself.

Jack I agree that it is not an automatic progression, but it used to be the case. I remember it once being said that when people become organised, start acting in a collective way in the trade union movement, then that is the first step towards a broader political outlook. After all, two-thirds of them used to vote Labour. The problem that we have got to confront is that there is a serious and long-term decline in support for the Labour Party which is reflected now in a major way in the trade union movement. Why? There have been profound changes in the economy. We have increasingly seen the growth of a technician class not wedded to Labour. There has also been increasing affluence amongst, for example, skilled workers and technicians and a growth, particularly in those areas, of non-political trade unionism. And the historic lesson that it is not enough to act within the workplace alone, but that you have to act on a broader front if you want change, is being forgotten.

In relation to the last election, and indeed 1979, there was a real credibility problem in the trade union movement. Many ordinary union members — and the public at large too — didn't believe we had a real alternative to Thatcherism. All the polls show that unemployment is the issue that concerns people most. What we were not able to do was to take the next step which was to convince ordinary people that we have a real answer to unemployment, a credible alternative. And following on from that, I think the problem within the trade union movement and for Labour generally is that over 20 or 30 years this growth of non-political trade unionism has often surrendered the ideological ground. There has been a big shift in attitudes towards trade unionism itself, the welfare state and nationalisation.

Of course that includes the experience also of two Labour governments.

Jack That's the point I make about surrendering the ideological ground. Within the trade union movement it would be absolutely right to say that the experience of Labour in power has got a lot to answer for. One of the things that we have got to do within the unions is rebuild the faith in popular trade unionism, a zeal for trade unionism, so that it is more than just next year's pay claim. But we also have to re-win the ideological ground which we clearly have lost.

Pete This separation of the unions from politics is the nub of the problem. In the period since 1945 that Dan spoke about, there has been a growth in the trade union movement and, with the exception of 1966, a steady decline in Labour's share of the vote with an all-time low this year. It's not just a question of Labour in power, it's also the question of Labour in opposition. This was demonstrated clearly during the election. Labour presented, just three weeks before the election, the most left manifesto that we have seen since the war. And to think you can reverse the decline of political thinking over that period amongst trade unionists in three weeks with a manifesto that is not fought for really is an underestimation by the leadership of the labour movement of the deep political crisis that faces the working class.

Bob Haven't we got to see this as a movement away from the Left generally in British politics? Sure the labour movement remains a mass political force. But there has been a movement in the general sense away from left politics . . .

Dan I don't think that's true, I think left politics have grown in this country.

Bob I don't think it has, on a mass basis. One aspect of the problem is what has happened in the Labour Party. Take parliamentary candidates for example: an increasing proportion come from the what you might call the professional middle class or higher working class. The Labour Party isn't seen as deeply associated with the interests of trade unionists, as it was in the 40s and 50s.

Jack Tebbit is reputed once to have said that he understands the thinking of the man in the public bar. That's a very significant comment because the new breed of Tory is a populist animal. It's a very dangerous animal that kind of populism, especially given the problems we are now discussing. Now I want to give you another example of our problem. I addressed a rally of print workers on the Monday before the general election and they were all very enthusiastic. I was chatting afterwards to a group of very good lads and lassies and one of them said 'we are having a hell of a bloody time in our chapels arguing for support for Labour'. I asked why. He said 'Labour is all about the underprivileged and deprived and

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what we ought to do for them'. 'Jack' he said, 'we may be well organised and we may kick hell out of the employer regularly and we may have very good standards of organisation, but if there's one thing we ain't, it's underprivileged and deprived'.

What I think is still perhaps underestimated, but would follow from exploring Jack's earlier remark, is that there have been very important shifts in the composition of the working class, the circles from which these new sections are drawn, their outlook and ideology.

Judith I think it is a basic problem. Our members, by and large, hate the word political and it's a perpetual battle. 'Why are you talking about that, it's political? Why aren't you talking about what our next pay claim should be? We're not interested in CND. We're not interested in abortion. We're not interested in solidarity with Chile, El Salvador, Poland or anywhere. That's political, we don't want to know, push it to one side'. As Dan says that's not how they see a trade union: they see it as being a sort of insurance policy to look after them and make sure their wages keep up.

Pete We don't always face it though, do we? I've just got a whole list of TUC education material. You look through it — and this has been going on for years and years — and all the classes are based on how to be a good shop steward, how to be a good representative health and safety wise, how to conduct negotiations and so on. This expertise is absolutely essential for trade unionists in today's complex world of bargaining, but what is lacking is any vision, any socialist ideas, we're our own worst enemies.

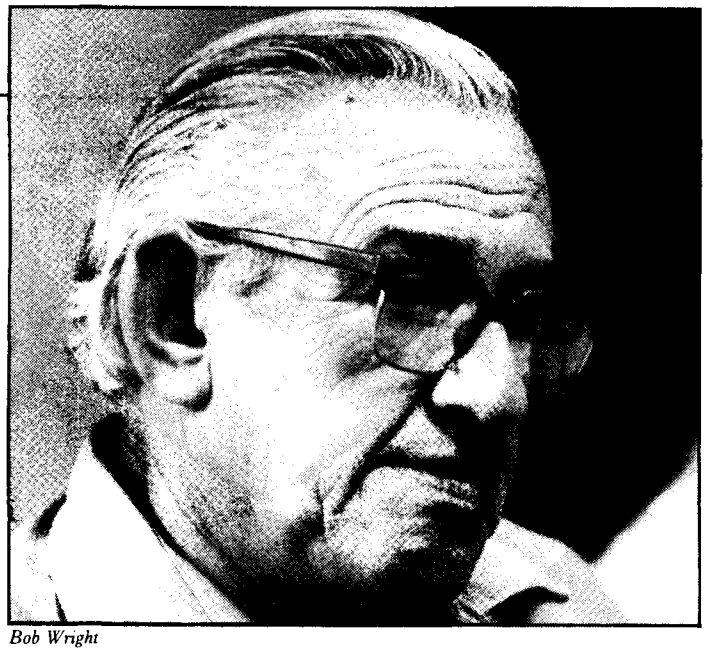
Dan People who have joined trade unions in the last 30 years, when the big expansion has taken place, have seen it as an immediate solution to their everyday problems. Previously the large industrial working class we had in this country saw the solution to their problems as the social ownership of things. You had to take it over. Now for local government workers, school teachers and so on, the concept of nationalisation of their industry is meaningless. I think that is part of the problem.

Jack It is easy to understand the reasons for the growth of non-political trade unionism. Over that 30 years there were some historic struggles but, by and large, good shop stewards organisation in the workplace, within an economy that was ever expanding, was able to satisfy the aspirations of members. That's now come to an end.

Judith While you've got economic buoyancy, plenty of jobs, pay rises to be had almost for the asking, then people are satisfied. They're not going to be looking much further than that and so the debate died really. What I think we've lost is people being accustomed to having political arguments in the workplace. It's an effort now to get a political discussion going in the workplace, and a lot of people are embarrassed by it. Politics is the new obscenity almost. If we're talking about going back to the Victorian era, instead of covering up the piano legs we'll cover up the politics.

Dan Where I work, I find that politics is the everyday talk. Maybe it's a fact of being an industrial worker, I find my experience is totally different to that.

We all recognise that we face a very serious problem here: a Labour Party which is in serious trouble; and a trade union movement whose fastest growing section is not traditionally connected with the Labour Party. This brings us to the question of affiliation to the Labour Party



Bob Wright

Judith Crabtree

and to the role which affiliated unions may play. It also raises the possibility of unions beginning to move in a quite different political direction because they don't see the Labour Party as expressing their political requirements, or don't see much prospect of another Labour government.

Bob We must always remember that only 60% of the total trade union membership is affiliated to the Labour Party. Now, I believe that we are seeing a whole change in the nature of employment in this country and we haven't really absorbed it in the trade union movement or the political movement. The manual shop floor workers by association, by reading and by discussing politics were and are the lifeblood of the Labour Party, and it was from those industrial workers that the power of the Labour Party developed to a very large extent. There was an intelligentsia attached to it but there was also this basic element. Now the nature of employment has changed. We now have three elements: the administrative staff who have grown; a new element, the technologists and those associated with the impact of technology who see themselves as a third force; and the remnants of the mass of industrial workers who have been replaced by all sorts of electronics and so on. It's this change that has bred a new element who vote Tory by conviction not by a lumpen loyalty. They vote Tory because they believe this sort of freedom policy, 'if you can make it, good.' I think that a lot of this has crept in.

Jack There is a problem. But we shouldn't panic. We have to re-learn the lesson of the 19th century; that there is an

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inevitable link between politics and trade unionism and that in turn means that the voice of organised labour in parliament is the Labour Party. The Labour Party, quite rightly though, is more than the voice of organised labour. It has to win other sections of the community as well. We've a difficult job to do on a number of levels. We've got to refresh the parts that Labour and — I hate to say it — the trade union movement have not reached for many years. That involves a style of organisation, but it also involves speaking to the needs of ordinary people in a language that they understand. There is an elitest, vanguardist view in many sections of the British trade union movement, and particularly in the Labour Party, that the members will always be loyal. You call them out of the trenches, you charge halfway across the field, you look over your shoulder, and there's no bastard behind you. We've got to recognise that it's far better to take 10,000 people one step forward than it is to take you and one other ten steps forward.

Sandra At the moment, there is this crisis of credibility in the relationship between the unions and the Labour Party. The Trade Unions for Labour Victory are saying to the Labour Party you ought to do X, Y and Z. Now for Labour there is a credibility problem: at the end of the day there is no actual evidence that they can deliver the goods because their members didn't vote Labour. So who exactly are they speaking for? On the other hand, unions are entitled to have this crisis of credibility with the current Labour leadership by saying that when they were in power they didn't deliver the goods. We must be prepared to sit down as comrades, brothers and sisters again — as opposed to saying you did this wrong or you did that wrong. But we have a real problem about sorting out the relationship . It will all fall apart unless we start working out how each one delivers the goods the other one needs. Because until you know, there might be a platonic friendship, but it's no basis for a long term living relationship.

Dan As far as the TGWU and the AUEW are concerned, its made quite clear within their declaration of membership that the function of unions is to control the means of production. That's written into the constitution. It's part of the aims and aspirations of the membership.

That's the formal position. But we are trying to get to grips with the gulf that has opened up between the rank and file and some of the traditional objectives of the movement.

Dan The point you're making, Sam, is do our membership understand that? That's down to us because we haven't educated them in that direction. I only wish we had been involving the membership to a much greater degree over the last 25 years. If we had, maybe we wouldn't have witnessed the disastrous policies that we had with previous Labour governments. There are some very positive gains to be had out of this idea of involving the membership in political discussion.

I don't want us to dodge the fact that we have a situation where, even in unions affiliated to the Labour Party, it is likely that the majority of their members did not vote Labour at the last general election. There is therefore a big gulf between any statement in the constitution or anything like that and the actual situation in those unions. Yet those unions are crucial in relation to the future of the Labour Party, in determining its policy, and its leaders. Now, how do we deal with that situation? What roles should the unions try to play? What view do you have, for example, on the whole contracting-in contracting-out debate which is, after all, part of the whole problem?

Pete I agree very much with the need to politicise the unions, but the two immediate things that come to mind are the question of the leadership of the Labour Party and the political levy. Now if we want to defend certain things, we must be honest and open about existing problems. Now I'm not happy about the question of the political levy and the way it frequently operates now. I've signed hundreds of workers into the building union and when they've asked me the contribution I've told them it's 75p or whatever it was, but I have never, ever told them — now I may be unique but I would think that many trade union officials operate like that — that 5p of their contribution was going to Labour. Now that kind of approach has stopped the debate about the relationship between the unions and the Labour Party. I asked someone in the AEUW the other day about people in his branch opting out. He said, 'No problem. We make it that difficult for them. When they turn up at the branch the form's not there and they aren't going to come back to opt out.' Now if this is the level of argumentation or the strategy for winning the conviction from people to vote or commit themselves to the Labour Party through their union, then we're on a suicidal course. Tebbit's going to win on that issue and we have to recognise that fact. On the question of leadership, I believe that every member who pays the political levy should have the right to a say who that leader should be, be it by a postal, branch or factory ballot. Now if we take these two issues on board and confront them, then it's going to force us to develop argumentation that is going to enrich the whole movement.

Bob Well, first, I think the trade unions should be countering the government proposals which only take us back to pre-1945 when it used to be contracting-in. And we should be countering it with a clear demand that that section of the 1913 legislation should be abolished, and that unions should determine from their general funds the level of political affiliation and association. This is the criterion that we should argue on because it puts us on a par with any employers' organisation or group of employers who contribute politically to the Tory Party and to organisations which are appendages of the Tory Party. Up till 10 years ago by the way, the AUEW used to show the political contribution separately on the card as a quarterly levy. The reason we abolished it was because of check-off; employers couldn't adjust to deduct a quarterly levy.

Second, in the position that we now face, I believe that block vote has been brought into disrepute by the unions themselves, by abuse, misuse and dictation over the years. People, Right and Left, have used the phrase 'our block vote will determine the position'. Now members say to me, what's the point of becoming an individual member of the Labour Party when our single union's block vote outvotes the whole of the constituency membership. That has detracted from union membership of the Labour Party. Now although we have 2,400 out of about 2,600 branches in our union affiliated to the local Labour Party, which is very high, two-thirds of those don't send delegates to the local party. The District Committees control the fund and they pay the affiliation on behalf of the branches: it's a situation we've got to reverse. If the unions have a political role, which I believe they have, it's got to be emphasised at local level rather than national. I believe that that will revitalise trade union involvement. The other point I would make is this: the demise of joint trades councils and Labour Parties that we had up to about 20 years ago has had a terrific effect upon trade union influence and involvement. I know some of the arguments for bringing that split about. But it has weakened trade union political involvement.

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Judith, you come from a union that is not *affiliated.*

Judith To this extent I'm speaking as an observer, and I think Bob is absolutely right when he says that the block vote is totally discredited and creates enormously bad feeling in the constituency parties. Because the constituency parties are slogging their guts out to get people elected in local and general elections and in a large number of constituencies the local branches of the trade unions are conspicuous by their absence. Yet when it comes to conference, and determining policy, who has the majority vote? I'm not sure I agree with Bob about rejoining the trade union and Labour Party trades councils because that does create enormous problems for the non-affiliated unions.

Bob I wasn't arguing in favour of it. I said that's what brought about the demise of trade union political involvement at that level.

Judith That's probably true, but we have got to find other ways of recreating that link at local level because it is at local level where an awful lot of the hard work is done in actually getting people elected. While 2½ million pounds was very much appreciated, we were very short of bodies in an awful lot of constituencies to do the canvassing and the carrying of the old ladies to the polling stations.

Jack On constituency parties and the lack of involvement of union branches, it is a two-way process. Constituency parties also have to win the support of the trade union movement in their area. And frankly some constituency parties, particularly in Greater London, are light years away from the reality of day to day experience of people at work and in the community. And when we say to trade unionists, you ought to be involved in politics and you get them along to their local Labour Party, too often they find endless debates about Afghanistan, about god knows where else, but never a debate about unemployment in the area, about housing, about the key issues affecting ordinary working people. That's not to say issues like Afghanistan are unimportant, but if you are going to involve working people in matters of that kind, you have to speak first to their immediate needs and win them, and if you do that, then you can proceed to argue for a perspective that includes broader matters.

Now on the points raised by Pete. On contracting-in and contracting-out, we can never assume that because someone signs a trade union form that they automatically support the Labour Party. We have to win the positive allegiance of workers for Labour, to rewin support in a mass way. On the issue of extending the voting franchise, I'm all in favour of doing that, though there are certain practical problems. In my own organisation, we had a debate at the biennial delegate conference, and Moss Evans argued that to have a yearly vote on the question of who should lead the Labour Party would eat up nearly three-quarters of our political fund. But the broad principle is absolutely right. We do have to involve members, and that is going to be a painful process because we have neglected large parts of the membership of the British trade union movement.

Pete On the contracting-out issue, Jack's hit the nail on the head when he says it's a very difficult point at this moment, and that is why Tebbit has taken it up, because he knows exactly that particular weakness.

Sandra I do wonder whether or not we might be nearer to winning this battle than we are allowing ourselves to believe. Because certainly in the 15 years I've been active it has never been a burning issue on the shopfloor. I don't remember in my own union or in the labour movement, the contracting-in, contracting-out issue being one which people were actually talking about, and saying they felt oppressed because their particular union contracted-in. To the best of my knowledge, union head offices are not under siege from people demanding back their 3p or whatever it is.

Pete The point I was making is that it is going to be made a much bigger issue and are we prepared for that?

Sandra I think most of the members who pay the political levy have got some concept of what they are doing. They may not be delirious about it, but I don't think it's a key issue in their mind.

Dan I believe that if people want to contract out or dispute the use of our political levy, they've got a right to do that and the place to do it is the union branch. That's where it should be done.

Jack Our position is that we say very clearly that members have an absolute right to contract-out. We must knock on the head this nonsense where we say that members have that right but we make it difficult for them: they have to go to the third tree on the left of Hyde Park on February 29 and there they might find a contracting-out form. Thus, first there is the broad battle that needs to be waged and won within the unions at every level about why the historic link with Labour is important. But secondly, I think we need to gear up our officers, stewards and branches so that, if they are approached by a member, they have the information, the argument, on one side of A4. It must be clear that, if a member wishes to contract out, then they have an absolute right to do that, but first we must ask for a discussion with them about it. We've got to organise ourselves to take the argument into every workplace.

Pete I agree with that, but a point on the branches. You see the residential branch life is very much in decline, and I don't think you're going to reverse that. We've got to start demanding, as a democratic right in relation to what Tebbit's trying to do, meetings of trade unionists at the point of production in working time, paid for, in order that the fullest participation of members can take place.

There are quite substantial unions which are not affiliated to the Labour Party and to whom the discussion we have been having doesn't directly apply. What about their perspective, where are they going, how do they see their relationship with politics and with the Labour Party?

Judith NALGO had a ballot last year of all its members on whether to affiliate to the Labour Party or not. And it went down probably more massively than anything's ever gone down before. In fact, it was a dreadful mistake, there's no doubt about it and it put us back three years, possibly five. We thought we would get defeated anyway, that's got to be said from the beginning. We knew when we moved the motion at conference to have a ballot that we would be defeated in the ballot.

Jack Why did you do it?

Judith Because the idea has been mooted for long enough for it to be a possibility — I can't put it any stronger than that.

Sandra There was also this historical thing in NALGO that it

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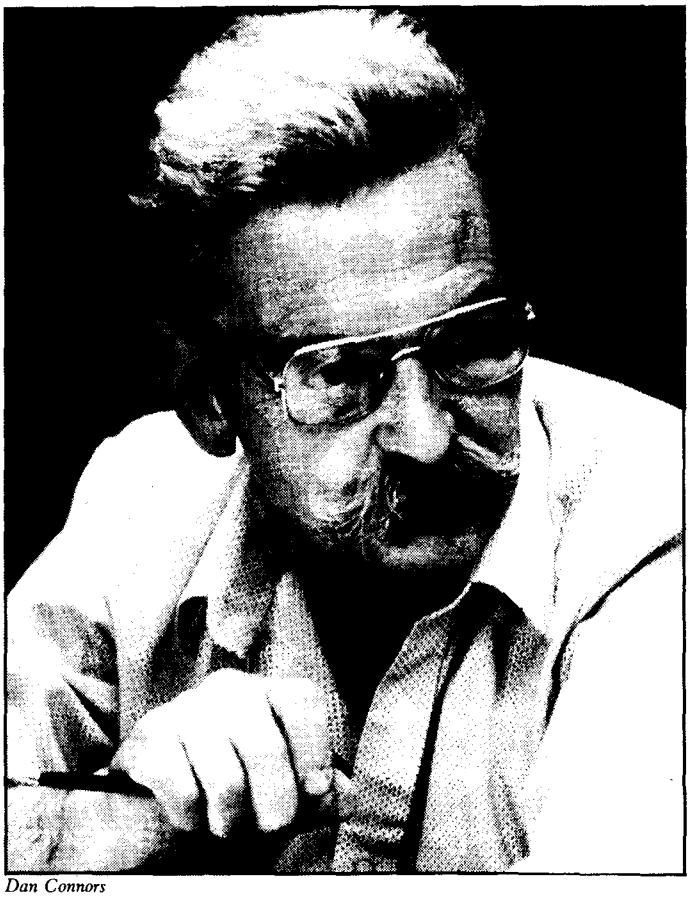

Dan Connors

had taken six ballots to get into the TUC. That influenced the approach to the Labour Party question: a start had to be made.

Judith Certainly in terms of our political as opposed to our party political development, it did us a power of no good and we lost some people off the NEC as a direct result of their support for affiliation. And the other thing it did of course was to teach the Right to organise which is also a mistake.

Bob I understand this business of testing the water. But I think that, in honesty, if some unions in the present climate took a ballot of all their members on whether to remain affiliated there might be a question mark about it. I'm talking about unions who've got it embedded in the rules.

The newer sections of the trade union movement, the white collar professional, scientific, and administrative groups, are not traditionally affiliated to the Labour Party, though some are. But these are the sections that are growing and therefore the balance is shifting within the trade union movement with respect to support for and affiliation to the Labour Party. In that case it is worthwhile just considering the possibility — given the decline of Labour and the rise of the Alliance, for instance — of some kind of political division among trade unions of a sort that we have not hitherto experienced.

Bob Let's be blunt, it's the SDP that is going to be the challenger and not the Communist Party, nor other leftist groups. This question has surfaced in ASTMS, where they had a movement of members saying they wanted to affiliate to the Tory Party. They'd pay the political levy, but they wanted the rules changed so there could be a group of their members who could opt to affiliate to the Tory Party, either on a local or a national level. Now these splinters are dangerous because one factor that we must recognise in British trade union structure is that we have one trade union centre in the TUC. If you go to Europe, you've got the Christian unions, the Communist-led unions, and the left unions. You'd certainly have to restructure if we were talking about more than one affiliation to more than one political party.

Judith I don't see it happening quite honestly. I don't think the non-affiliated white collar public sector trade unions will affiliate to the Labour Party in the forseeable future, but I don't think they'll try and affiliate to anything else either. The policies of most of them are closer to the Labour Party than they are to those of any other political party. And even if we can't commit ourselves politically to the extent of supporting MPs and putting money into the Labour Party, we can at least continue the argument for those policies. No public sector union like mine would think about affiliating to any party other than the Labour Party simply because every other party says we've got to cut public expenditure.

Bob But you said earlier that one of the consequences of the NALGO affiliation ballot was that it taught the Right how to organise. Now this can't be underestimated because while the Tory Party has never been too concerned about trade union affiliation for a number of internal reasons which pose enormous contradictions for them, the SDP haven't got that approach. It's a fairly new party which has a distinct philosophy about winning over parts of the trade union movement and particularly white collar unions. I believe that there is a possibility of the Right organising around that. I certainly wouldn't underestimate the possibility.

Pete But hasn't this already begun in a small way? We are beginning to see political line-ups, and unions talking of mergers where they have absolutely nothing in common, like the EEPTU and APEX. Chapple made his position clear on the Labour Party when he came out in support of an SDP candidate at the election. Now if that merger does take place then it could set the scene and may influence other unions, affiliated or not.

Sandra There's probably less danger among the non-affiliated unions like NALGO, because there's a very strong feeling which Judith has already identified that they are non-political. That may be unrealistic, it may be untrue, it may be naive, but there is this very strong 'we are public servants, we cannot be political' feeling. That certainly would influence people in NALGO to vote against affiliation to whatever party.

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Judith There were an awful lot of individual Labour Party members in NALGO who voted against affiliation.

Sandra I think the danger Pete pointed to is the more real one: that is, that the links of unions at present affiliated to the Labour Party could, for a lot of reasons, become substantially weaker. That's the area we should concentrate on rather than worrying about whether NALGO might affiliate to the SDP which is, I think, a non-issue.

Jack The strength and weakness of the British trade unions, which Bob referred to, is that you've got one union centre. It is a strength that we don't have unions split along religious and sectarian lines. Simultaneously, it's a weakness that we have in the British trade union movement an increasingly large number of trade unionists who do not see themselves as being in any way affiliated to the Labour Party. I would make two points in relation to preventing the growth of sectarian trade unionism. First of all we have got to ensure that we maintain a broad approach. You sometimes hear it said that to be a trade unionist you've got to support Labour. I think that's wrong; there's a lot of good trade unionists who don't support Labour yet. My attitude is different. We must win people into the trade union movement and, having won them, we then try to persuade them that trade unionism without Labour is a blind alley.

The other point is that the possible scenario for the growth of sectarian trade unionism in Britain would be if Labour were to decline further as a major political party, because at that stage trade union pragmatism would come into play. You would have people within a union saying, 'well, we've got to survive over a very long period in a hostile climate and if that means we've got to adjust to survive, and weaken the link with Labour, so be it'. So maintaining Labour as a major and credible alternative to the Tories is very important in preventing unions breaking away from Labour and affiliating to other political parties.

What you've said leads naturally to the whole question of perspective. We are in for a rough spell, the present attack will intensify over the next three or four years. Yet we have witnessed some brilliant examples of solidarity and resistance in different parts of the country. So let's move on to the question of how the trade union movement is going to respond, and particularly the Left. What's going to be the basis of the campaign to rebuild the unions as tribunes of the people, as centres of popular strength and campaigning.

Bob I believe that the real challenge for the unions is accountability, that structures become more accountable. The Transport and General Workers probably stands out in this respect over the last 20 years: it has moved away from central bureaucracy into accountability right down the line. The AUEW on the other hand has moved away from its accountability: attacks have taken place on district committees which were and still are a valuable instrument in the structure of the union. Now if we analyse the role of the Trade Unions for Labour Victory, I think it has become an elitist club of trade unions telling the Labour Party what it should be doing, and there's tremendous resentment because of that. To the rank and file, it's an enigma. It's seen as a bit of a fix-it organisation. That won't do.

Sandra The issue of women is worth raising not only because of the position of women themselves but because it is an example of the way the trade unions will have to adapt and change if they are

Pete Carter

going to fulfill the sort of role you were talking about. You see we're quite good at saying that what we've got to do is advance political ideas among the membership, we must educate them. I think there are a lot of issues where in fact it's exactly the reverse, that the membership could actually educate us. One of the big failings of the trade union movement over the last few years is that the leadership demonstrate a remarkable reluctance to be educated by their own members. The issue of women highlights this. Why don't women come to union meetings? Can we cope with the idea that they don't come to union meetings because union meetings are boring, irrelevant and uninteresting?

If you look at the TUC one-day conference at Wembley on the Tebbit Bill, to which the executives of all TUC unions were invited, there must have been about 30 women in the hall and just one woman spoke. Now the only hope working women and probably women in the home have is the trade union movement fighting for them for equal pay, for nursery places. It comes back to this great gap between theory and practice. Look at the way the trade union movement addresses itself to the issues women raise, the issues that black members raise. The priority it puts on these issues is overwhelmingly zilch, despite a few good exceptions.

Dan Certainly what you're saying is totally alien to my experience. 60% of my workforce are black people and they're very concerned about trade unions and use the unions more than most. Now the women's issue is a very complex thing which deserves examination. I don't know how to do it. We've got 250 women who work with me. Our women machinists are very active trade unionists who led the fight on equal pay and recently led a very important dispute for us on the question of grading. They led the way and we gave them every support. But still we can't get them to a trade union branch. It's very difficult. I don't know the answer. But I'm still curious about whether that is the issue which is going to dominate the thinking on the role of the trade unions in relationship to the Labour Party over the next few years.

Judith I think it's one of the issues that's got to. You're talking about slightly more than 50% of the voting population and you need those votes if Labour's going to get back. 59% of married women now go out to work and in a lot of areas like the West Midlands it's the women who are now the only earners in a family. Now an awful lot of these women don't see the relevance of the union — and frankly why should they when the TUC and the Labour Party both push women's issues off into separate conferences which then have no effect whatsoever on the main conference? Individual unions, I grant you, are doing good work in actually trying to involve women members and trying to sort out problems. But an awful lot of unions still hold their branch meetings at 7 o'clock in the evening. Pete's point earlier about

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Jack Dromey

branch meetings being held in the workplace in work time is absolutely vital if you're going to involve mothers and wives and so on in them.

Jack I think we need to assert our belief in trade unionism — without it working people have nothing — but then move on to be deeply self-critical. We need to knock on the head simplistic slogans and analyses as to what the problem is. I remember being in a meeting last year where a brother officer from NUPE got attacked from the floor by somebody who said: 'The ten million workers in the British trade union movement want socialism and the only problem is they're held back by people like you.' My reply is, if there are really ten million revolutionaries in the trade union movement held down by a corrupt bureaucracy, they would sweep that corrupt bureaucracy aside and we'd have socialism tomorrow.

The reality is much more complex and we need to argue for an end to a narrow and sectarian approach in the trade union movement, in particular the idea that the real movement is the industrial vanguard and that the rest of the movement is a second-rate, second class kind of trade unionism. My position is simple: you can only work with the troops that you've got and if the economy has changed so must we. There are certain strong traditions in the industrial working class that we've got to preserve and build up, but at the same time we've got to develop trade unionism, political trade unionism in other areas of the economy. We then need to make the trade unions fully representative because in their structures they are not. Can I give one example? When I went along to the first meeting of the Health Service Ancilliary Staff's Council, on which the four unions are represented with four people from each union, I found not one single woman in an area of employment where a considerable majority are women.

We also need to develop a much greater level of membership involvement. It's no use just having activist talking to activist. It's like in some redundancy situations, stewards talk to stewards, stewards talk to convenors, convenors talk to full-time officers, no bastard talks to the members. We've got constantly to work at involving the membership in every area of our work, particularly in relation to our political work. The next thing is that we need to work in a broad and imaginative way and that means on the one hand the Peoples' March For Jobs, but on the other hand it also means constantly saying to members faced with problems, be it pay, redundancy or whatever, who are your natural allies and how can we win them? Because the battle for direct labour is the battle for good, decent homes, properly maintained. The battle for jobs in education is the battle for a decent education service. The battle for health service workers pay is not just about what people take home in their pockets at the end of the week; it is a battle for a good standard of patient care. We've got to argue for an approach that turns outwards into the community and seeks to win allies in the community for what we represent, and in so doing it will change our attitudes also. The campaign around the Inner London Education Authority, where we brought together an army of trade unionists and parents, stopped Thatcher dead in her tracks two years running in her attempt to break up ILEA, and the parents taught us a hell of a lot. It's a two-way process.

I remember the old Woodcock saying that we've left Trafalgar Square for the corridors of power. Well we were heaved out of the corridors of power four years ago and if you walk from Trafalgar Square to Congress House you will find along the route a lot of lost general secretaries with glazed looks in their eyes not quite sure how to find their way back again to Trafalgar Sqaure.

My final point is this. I don't think the message of socialism is wrong, the problem is not the message, it's the messenger.

Pete The trade union movement has got to develop styles of work and policies that poeple can identify with in their everyday life, such as imaginative campaigns about unemployment and the fight for peace. Resolutions at the TUC are one thing, and a very important thing, but in practice, as Greenham Common illustrated, the lack of trade union support on a lot of peace issues over the last couple of years is quite a serious problem for us. The issues on which we can build a movement need to be identified. Secondly, we have to take on board, in the framework of the point that Jack made, the experience of the traditional trade unions with the reality and the experience of the new forces. Thirdly, we need unity. We must unite the trade union movement around a limited programme and I'm sure we can get that. At the moment it shows great divisions and this only goes to undermine the confidence of the members. Fourthly there's a need for unions to develop policies for industries. We're too defensive, we respond to situations that have been created. We've got to take on board particular policies for industries, including concepts of socially useful work and socially useful labour which we're not really facing up to. And once we can get ourselves right both on policy and unity on a limited programme, it's then possible to develop a meaningful relationship with forces outside of our ranks, on issues of mutual concern. Because there is a relationship between the peace fight of the unions and the peace fight of CND that as yet we haven't developed.

The final point I want to make is this. One of the greatest things that has happened in the last three weeks is the transport Union's victory over the disposal of nuclear waste in the sea. The more we can get unions to defend what they're immediately there for, but at the same time to take on board wider issues of that character in areas where others haven't got the muscle, then the more unions will begin to win a respect not just among their own members but from people outside their ranks. On that basis we can begin to build a meaningful alliance.

But that also means that we've got to be absolutely honest and face up to problems. When, for example, we're talking about transport policies, we have to talk about policies which are not in the interests necessarily of our members but in the interests of society as a whole, and that means looking at an integrated system. This will come into conflict with people working in the car industry and with lorry drivers, for example, but in my view the more juggernauts we can get off the roads and onto the railways the better. But this raises all kinds of contradictions we have to face. We have to move into an area where we begin to talk as trade unionists not in sectional interests, although we have to defend them to a certain degree, but in terms of how we can intervene to make society a much better place to live in, and to do that with a style of work and in a language that people can understand. □

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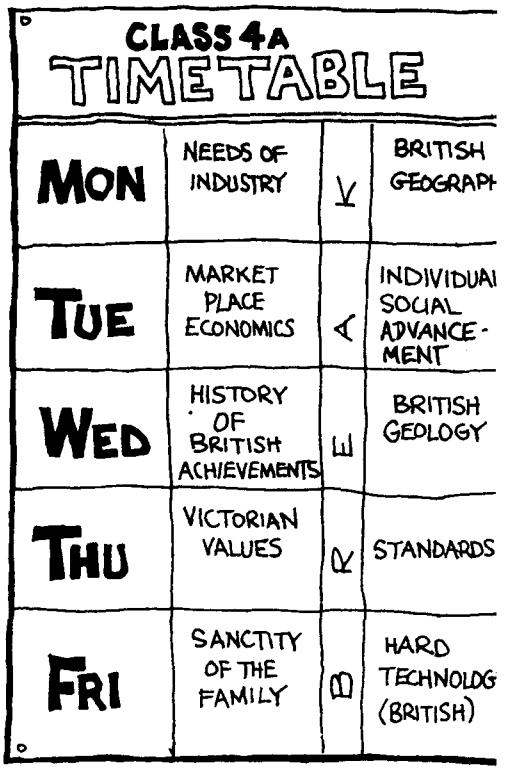

Thatcherism is reducing the quality and quantity of education available from the state. The Left's response should be more than a simple defence of what we have.

James Donald

Class of '83

In February of this year, while she was still figuring out when to hold an election, Margaret Thatcher held a series of meetings with backbench Tory MPs. At one, she was asked what the Government was going to do about education. Bluntly she replied according to the *Guardian* that 'It's a disaster'.

Given that admission, why did Labour fail to make any mileage out of the education issue in the June election, as the Tories had been able to do with their 'Education isn't working' slogan in the 79 campaign? One reason was that the Callaghan Government's policies had not been all that different from its successor's and it was Labour that eventually broke the postwar consensus about educaiton. James Callaghan and Shirley Williams, his Education Secretary, lifted the terms of reference for their 'Great Debate' about education in 1976 pretty well verbatim from the radical right's Black Papers of the late 60s and mid-70s. Coming in on the tail end of Labour's strategy of modernisation, their particular concern was to make education serve the 'needs of industry' more directly. To that end, the Callaghan Government set up the Manpower Services Commission, a quango answerable to the Secretary of State for *Employment* not Education, to find ways of containing the social problems created by mass youth unemployment.

Labour out of power has gone on talking as though nothing had changed. Its policy documents still rely on the old platitudes — calls for increased provision, less divisive institutions, greater access and the ending of private schools. The problem is not so much of Labour's bad faith, as of a lack of political imagination. The depressing truth is that Labour has not really had any new ideas about education since the comprehensive school nearly forty years ago. Of course, the principle of free, universal, non-selective education remains crucial. But the battle for institutional change on its own should not be allowed to distract attention from the more intractable social and cultural questions bound up in education. What happens *inside* the institutions is more important than the label over the gates.

For many students and parents, the experience of schooling has been one primarily of a compulsorily imposed state institution (over which they, as clients, have little say) and of an alienating and exclusive curriculum. The critique from the Right — in the Black Papers, for example, and in a sustained press campaign — had a degree of success because it did manage to plug into genuine popular perceptions, grievances and worries. The loss of support for a state-provided service, often perceived as coercive, and to which Labour was seen as perhaps too uncritically committed, is the sort of shift in popular consciousness that Thatcherism has fed upon.

The Left is therefore faced with a dilemma. How can it resist Conservative policies without slipping into an uncritical defence of the way things were before? The alternative to the present mess cannot be a return to the old mess. The critique of Thatcherism needs to disentangle the various threads of its strategy and to take acount of (and learn from) its strengths. The alternative should be posed not just in terms of different policies, but as part of a broader view of the educational aspects of politics and of the place of the education system in a strategy for social and cultural change. That means being equally critical of the Left's own educational assumptions.

Educational Thatcherism

To talk of a strategy perhaps imputes too coherent an approach to education by the present government. Often its decisions and actions seem to be based more on incompetence or malign neglect. Nevertheless, there is clearly a vision of what education should be. In the Thatcherite utopia, Richard Johnson has recently commented, 'education is a consumer good, acquired and regulated through the market, according to demand in the shape of parental choice.'[1] So how are the present policies working towards that goal?

In the 1979 campaign, the Tories made brave promises about halting and reversing the decline in educational standards at the same time as cutting public expenditure. The tension between these two was soon resolved in favour of the latter. According to Angus Maude, one of the early architects of Thatcherism, 'It has always been far too expensive to improve the educational standards of working-class children significantly' (*Observer*, 2 January 1983).

In the four years of Mrs Thatcher's first government, 10% was lopped off spending on education. By 1983, £2 billion had been taken out of the system, 800 schools had been closed, and 38,000 teaching posts had disappeared — 11,000 in a single year.[2] The effects of these cuts have been charted in a series of reports by Her Majesty's Inspectorate. Buildings have become shabby. There are not enough books and equipment. An already restricted curriculum is contracting further. Nursery provision, along with much remedial and specialist work, is being abandoned. There are too few properly qualified teachers. One report summarised the position like this: 'Teachers' morale was worn very thin as the uncertainties . . . arising from falling rolls and the cuts . . . affect both the maintenance of present standards and the attempts to bring about improvements.'[3]

Although central government can impose gross cuts through cash limits, it cannot easily control where or how particular cuts are made. These decisions rest with the local authorities, and most of their educational expenditure is committed to meeting the fixed costs of simply maintaining the school system. (Hence the part the particularly savage cuts in the university sector). Nevertheless, government priorities do show through in the ways that expenditure has been reorganised.

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The 1980 Education Act, for example, set up the Assisted Places Scheme to provide government grants to enable selected 'deserving' parents to rescue their clever children from the state system and send them to private schools. The cost was originally estimated at over £100 million, but opposition — some from the private sector — meant that the scheme was cut by half when it began in September 1981. By 1988 it is designed to cater for 30,000 children and cost £55 million pounds each year. So far £12.6 million has been spent on switching 8,500 children to the private sector, 22% below target.[4] The APS reveals how restricted the Tory commitment to 'parental choice' really is. It also represents a first step towards 'backdoor privatisation', towards taking responsibility for providing education away from the local authorities and handing it over to market forces. (Its funding would still come from the public purse, of course).[5]

At one time, it looked as though a second term of Thatcherism might produce a more radical and extensive form of privatisation, through the introduction of a voucher scheme, in which all parents would be given vouchers cashable at the school, maintained or private, of their choice. (Richer parents would be able to top up these allocations with payments of their own.) The Secretary of State for Education, Keith Joseph, declared himself 'intellectually attracted to the idea' and commissioned the eminently dry Lord Beloff to study its feasibility. Beloff concluded that 'it would be too disruptive' and, especially now Rhodes Boyson has been transferred from the DES to the DHSS, that seems to be the end of the idea for the moment.

Vocationalism

Much more significant are the intiatives being devised and implemented by the Manpower Services Commission, which reflect a commitment neither to parental choice nor to academic excellence, but to making education more vocationally 'relevant'. As Norman Tebbit observed during the 83 election campaign, 'we've taken the money away from the people who write about ancient Egyptian scripts and the pre-nuptial habits of the Upper Volta Valley.' Switching the money to the MSC has several advantages for the government. It allows more direct intervention into educational institutions than is possible for the defensive bureaucracy of the DES, which also has to negotiate the cumbersome machinery of local government. The MSC, often in collaboration with private firms, buys up places and funds courses in colleges of further education. As a result, the FE sector is by now pretty well in hock to the MSC.

Its Youth Training Scheme, now getting under way, will provide a year-long programme of work experience, training and/or education for 480,000 16-year-old school leavers. The trainees will receive £25 per week, and spend nine months in work experience and a further three months in off-the-job training, provided either by the employers or by the FE colleges. The estimated cost will be £1.1 billion.[6] The YTS indicates the other main advantage of the MSC for the government: it allows greater control over what is taught, and so seems to promise a way to 'vocationalise' education. This does not mean that it would teach young people specific craft skills. Instead, it puts them through Social and Life Skills programmes and concentrates on 'transferable skills' — a concept first developed in behaviourist experiments with rats. Often these boil down to infantile competences — how to push, pull, lift and carry — plus the most basic literacy. These skills actually represent the deskilling of labour, the inculcation of appropriate attitudes for a mobile, unskilled and frequently unemployed labour force — in short work discipline without the work.

The problem of how to deal with unemployed young people clearly requires urgent political and economic solutions. Indeed, some local authorities are developing specific policies for youth, and there are people working under the umbrella of the MSC and YTS who are able, on the margins, to create useful and imaginative schemes. But the overall effect of the YTS will undoubtedly be to reinforce and deepen the old divisions between education and training, between the mental and manual aspects of work. Most of the students who pass through it — and especially the disproportionately high number of black students — will be confronted in the end with either unemployment or unskilled labour. The scheme provides virtually no positive initiatives for young women. They get little chance of work experience in traditionally 'male' jobs; the Social and Life Skills programmes now include instruction in 'parentcraft' to teach them their allotted domestic role.

£12.6 million has been spent on switching 8,500 children to the private sector

Having cornered the FE sector, the MSC approach is now to be introduced into the

[1] Richard Johnson 'Educational politics: the old and the new', in Ann Marie Wolpe and James Donald (eds), *Is there anyone here from education?* Pluto 1983, p13.
[2] Rick Rogers, 'Margaret Thatcher's disaster: the record', *ibid* p29.
[3] Quoted in Ken Jones, 'Teachers and their organisations', *ibid* p137.
[4] Rogers, *op cit*, p31.
[5] Roger Dale, 'You ain't seen nothing yet: the prospects for education' *ibid*, p38.
[6] See Andy Green, 'Education and training: under new masters' *ibid*.

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schools through the Technical and Vocational Education Initiative. This provides funding for MSC-approved programmes of study for the 40% of 14 to 18-year-olds barred from attempting the new examination proposed to replace O level GCE and the Certificate of Secondary Education.

So along with these new vocational courses, a pseudo-traditional academic curriculum is being reasserted. The battle for control of the new 16+ exam seems to have been won by the universities, which controlled the old GCE boards. Changes in the selection and training of teachers will require them to have degrees in the subjects they are to teach. These will be restricted to subjects like English, History, Geography and the natural sciences; in accordance with Keith Joseph's phobia against the social sciences, they will not include 'second order' subjects like sociology, psychology and philosophy. The teachers' role will be to pass on established bodies of knowledge, not to consider how, why or whether they should be taught to particular groups of students. Moves to centralise control over the curriculum are also being secured institutionally. The Schools Council has been dissolved for being allegedly too political, or at least for giving the teaching profession too great a voice. It is being replaced by two separate bodies dealing with examinations and the curriculum, whose members will be appointed by, and answerable to, the Secretary of State. One of these bodies, the Assessment of Performance Unit, was set up within the DES by the Callaghan Government to monitor national standards in basic subjects and to identify areas of weakness. The reports it has produced so far have proved inconclusive, and no one seems to know quite what to do with them.

The Tory pattern

Broadly, the pattern emerging from Tory educational policy seems to be this. Under the sign of 'parental choice', private schools are being subsidised and encouraged to cream off students from the maitained sector.[7] While some schooling is thus being privatised, the standards of provision for most children will be allowed to run down — to improve them would be too expensive. Meanwhile, the polarity between the academic and vocational aspects of education is being reimposed, often all the more harshly for being within a single institution. The DES is extending its control over what is taught in schools, often from a narrowly academic perspective, while the free-spending MSC is buying up large chunks of further education for its 'vocational' programmes.

Not all education's hard times can be laid at Mrs Thatcher's door, though. It was, after all, the Callaghan Government which set most of the elements of this strategy in place. The difference lies mainly in the rhetoric about what education is supposed to be for. Some of the ideologues on the new High Tory Right do at least follow through the logic of recent developments. 'It is not possible to provide universal education,' writes Tory intellectual Roger Scruton, 'Nor, indeed, is it desirable.'[8] Education, for these true blues, is a privilege which cannot be democratically distributed. It is useful only to a limited community of scholars. Others require different civil institutions to prepare them for their humbler lot. Scruton does not object to the expense of universal education. He is hostile to the very *principle*. That line is unlikely to become government policy: institutional inertia and popular resistance would both rule it out. But Scruton's celebrations of the distinction between education for an elite and training or socialisation for the rest does make the orientation of current policy changes clear. It is in the nature of educational institutions, he insists, 'to create privileges and determine their distribution.'[9]

> education for an elite and training or socialisation for the rest

That is why the sometimes over-enthusiastic involvement of the TUC and many schools and colleges is so worrying. In rejecting the old academicism in favour of vocational relevance, they have bought a superficially more democratic package which is actually a more efficient way of producing and distributing such social privileges. From a very different perspective to Scruton's, Gramsci made a similar point in criticising MSC-style initiatives in Italian schools in the 20s. Such vocationalism, he warned, 'is destined not merely to preserve social differences but to crystallise them in Chinese complexities.'[10]

Education and the labour market

There is no point in denying that the education system has — and should have — intimate links with the divison of labour. Unfortunately, though, the Left's thinking about education has often been marked by a romantic anti-industrialism. The question we *should* be asking is not how to *sever* the connections between schooling and the production system, but how to make the connections explicit, how to recognise them, and how to make new ones.

At present, education serves a basic child-minding function which frees adults for the work force. More importantly, it also prepares people for entry into the labour market — not through specific training, but through more general processes of socialisation and, in particular, through the unequal distribution of qualifications. Although such credentials cannot guarantee employment, let alone a particular job, the lack of them denies people access to certain types of job.

Thus an education which is offered in the rhetoric of the welfare state as a route to individual social advancement turns out to be primarily a mechanism for reproducing relations of inequality and power. That's not all it is, of course, and education has provided a means of mobility for many people. But that basic tension does help to explain popular disenchantment with the system. People know from experience that even a comprehensive school system has not brought about significant social or economic changes. What they want from schools are not vague promises to liberate or develop their full human potential, but qualifications that might help them to get a job. This traditional view of the educational marketplace reasserts itself all the more forcefully in a period of high unemployment, when the competition for work becomes fiercer. It also means that a person's inability to get a job can be blamed on the school's failure to provide him or her with the necessary qualifications or skills.

But schools do not slot children *directly* into the division of labour: social differences crystallise into 'Chinese complexities' only as they are mediated through symbolic categories. It is the schools that establish these categories, of value and cultural legitimacy in the way forms of knowledge are ordered in the curriculum — the opposition between the academic and the vocational is itself not so much a practical distinction as a symbolic one. They then allow different social groups access only to specific types of knowledge, often on the basis of the natural aptitudes imputed to the individual child. The effect is to teach different intellectual competences, different forms of language, different attitudes and even different patterns of aesthetic and emotional response to different groups. It is these forms of what the French sociologist Pierre Bourdieu calls 'cultural capital', not job-related skills, that are cashable in return for access to higher levels of education and, eventually, privi-

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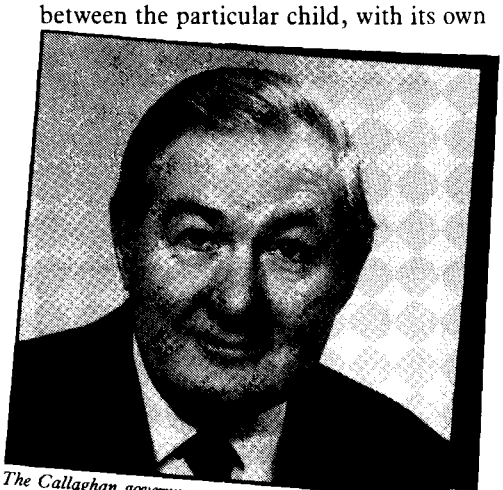
leged forms of employment. The economic effects of education — the initial sorting out of those entering the labour market — are achieved through the cultural differences it produces.

Education and culture

That proposition would probably not discomfort a reflective public school head. It poses trickier questions for some of the educational assumptions dominant among radical teachers, which often turn out to share the same terms of reference.

Take the 'progressive' approach to pedagogy, for example.[11] Its central proposition has been that education should be about encouraging the natural intellectual and emotional development of the child. 'Underlying all educational questions,' stated the 1967 Plowden report of primary education, 'is the nature of the child himself.' At its best, such teaching has approached learning as an interaction between the particular child, with its own



The Callaghan government prepared the ground for today's Tory education policies

social formation and experiences, and conceptual forms of knowledge. It has stressed the active role of the learner in the creation of knowledge. Often it has developed in reaction against more coercive and authoritarian methods. Especially in its libertarian variants, progressivism has declared itself on the side of the child, committed to freeing children from the oppressive institutions of capitalism.

Even at its best, though, there are difficulties with its conception of children and how they learn. The panoply of progressive methods for teaching and for organising the primary classroom are based on an image of children passing through a pre-ordained sequence of learning stages. This in turn derives from specific brands of developmental psychology which emerged along with other sciences of social regulation towards the end of the nineteenth century. These have established particular criteria of what is normal and natural, which are disseminated through a network of institutions and often backed up by legal, medical and ethical definitions. The power of such definitions is not simply ideological. It is secured through the institutions and practices which people encounter every day. In terms of educational psychology and progressive pedagogies, then, the nature of the normal child is defined with reference to its adjustment to existing social relations. The processes whereby the teacher supposedly uncovers the child's 'true' self are actually practices for defining particular forms of subjectivity and holding children to them.

The anti-intellectualism that sometimes stems from a progressive concern to allow children to develop 'at their own pace' has also affected much of the Left's thinking about the curriculum. The assumption often made here is that the real educational task is to liberate exploited or oppressed groups by re-presenting their experience, their language and their culture to them. The strength of these approaches has always been their insistence on starting from the experience of the learners, and on respecting the form of life and culture, the languages and values, the patterns of communication and interaction of the excluded groups.[12] The danger has been that they simply celebrate these forms, as though they had a special status which exempts them from critical scrutiny. This is the trap for teaching which aims to liberate working-class culture, female experience or a black voice without subjecting them to challenge or criticism.[13] Its effect is to freeze the culture and psychic structures of subordination, instead of teaching people new, often initially confusing and disturbing ways of making sense of the world and their place in it.

This is not to say that teaching cannot be organised around the inter-disciplinary study of particular topics or problems, as in Women's Studies, Black Studies or Cultural Studies. There is no need to swallow the conservative argument that the curriculum fixed in the latter part of the nineteenth century represents a natural intellectual order. But such teaching should always take account of the nature of academic disciplines. These disciplines are not implicit either in the natural development of the child's mind, nor in the topics of study themselves. Rather they embody particular ways of classifying knowledge and thinking about issues. These bodies of knowledge are then organised into the hierarchy of the curriculum and as Raymond Williams argued in *The Long Revolution*, this process embodies a cultural selection, 'a particular set of emphases and omissions'.

The ideological power implicit in the organisation of the curriculum is what is at stake in the current row about the teaching of history in schools. Right-wing historians like Lord Hugh Thomas want a renewed nationalistic emphasis on 'the British dimension' rather than a concern with social history. Other historians, like Christopher Hill, have called for a different emphasis on England's revolutionary history. In part, then, the row is about the construction of a national past, and so about the construction of an imaginary national identity for people today. (The racial connotations hardly need spelling out). But what is being taught is never simply the content of the syllabus. It is also ways of perceiving the world that we codified into particular disciplines. So an even more important question would perhaps be how the concepts, techniques and methodologies of history be introduced at different levels of education.

Similar points can be made about other areas of the curriculum. Literacy, for example, contains an important ambiguity. In the MSC sense it refers to the functional ability to read and write. But 'being literate' also retains connotations of a special literary sensibility, a familiarity with, and appreciation of, literature. The first sense — English as the first two of the 3Rs — suggests the imposition of the rules of 'standard English' and therefore the devaluation of other forms of the language. A sense of being at home with the standard language is a precondition for gaining access to the cultural capital stored not only in particular styles of speech, but also in national literature. Together, the imposition of administered forms of the language and limitations on access to the study of English literature operate a double exclusion for most students.

Even the teaching of a subject like mathematics reveals an analagous pattern — basic computation for the majority, a conceptual language of speculation for the

[7] See Caroline Benn, 'Independence and accountability for all' *ibid*.
[8] Roger Scruton, *The Meaning of Conservatism* Penguin 1980, p157.
[9] *ibid* p147.
[10] Selections from the Prison Notebooks, Lawrence and Wishart 1971, p40.
[11] The argument here draws on Valerie Walkerdine, 'It's only natural: rethinking child-centred pedagogy' in *Is there anyone here from education?*
[12] Stuart Hall, 'Education in crisis' *ibid* p7.
[13] Jean Bethke Elshtain, 'The social relations of the classroom', in *Towards a Socialist Pedagogy*, Monthly Review Press 1979, p303.

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few. And here the exclusions are as much to do with gender as with class or race — that bizarre distinction between 'hard', 'masculine' subjects like the natural sciences and the 'soft', 'feminine' arts subjects.

These are some the the symbolic mechanisms (of Chinese complexity, to be sure) through which educational institutions produce and distribute cultural capital. They establish criteria of cultural value and legitimacy; they distinguish the worthwhile from the trivial. In doing so, they do not discriminate only among forms of knowledge. They also differentiate between people, and justify the cultural power of particular learnt competence.

Labour educationalists have often shied away from the ideological implications of education. The thinking behind the comprehensive school was to find a common institution which would do away with restricted or privileged access. It did not really tackle the question of how to establish a comprehensive literacy of a common yet heterogeneous culture, though it was sometimes assumed that a grammar school curriculum could be democratised. In progressive thinking, the role of curriculum and pedagogy in *creating* a sense of reality, a culture, was displaced in favour of notions of setting children free. But the unequal relations of power sustained by education are not just those of the division of labour. They are also produced and distributed at a deeper, symbolic level. That is why any effective strategy must integrate cultural and political programmes.

A new strategy

In thinking about education the Left now needs a new strategic perspective which must emphasise the construction of a popular-democratic national culture — not in the abstract, but starting from the conditions that exist here and now. This could provide a principle for political calculation and for establishing priorities in addressing the critical economic and political questions confronting education. How is a massively expensive system to be funded in a period of limited or no growth? What is the proper role of education in both managing and transforming a crisis-ridden capitalist economy? How might the educational institutions (and the teachers and administrators who run them) be made more democratic and accountable?

My main emphasis has been that answers to such questions will make sense only if there is some idea of where education is heading. We don't have the option of trotting out a Thatcherism of the Left — the Left's visions cannot represent what people already know, they have to challenge common sense with new, uneasy alternatives. That will mean winning the educational arguments among teachers, parents and students. Working through parliament and the Labour Party for institutional change can no longer be the sole — or even the primary — focus for struggle. Nor can we reassure ourselves with dreams of liberating children from capitalist culture. The question to be faced is how to dismantle existing cultural distinctions (between mental/academic and manual/vocational, between high culture and popular culture, between masculine and feminine subjects) and how to create syllabuses, teaching methods and institutions capable of sustaining different definitions and values.

More than twenty years ago, Raymond Williams concluded his chapter on education in *The Long Revolution* by wondering whether the old forms of educational privilege would be replaced 'by the free play of the market, or by a public education designed to express and create the values of an educated democracy and a common culture.' We really haven't got very far in answering that question. □

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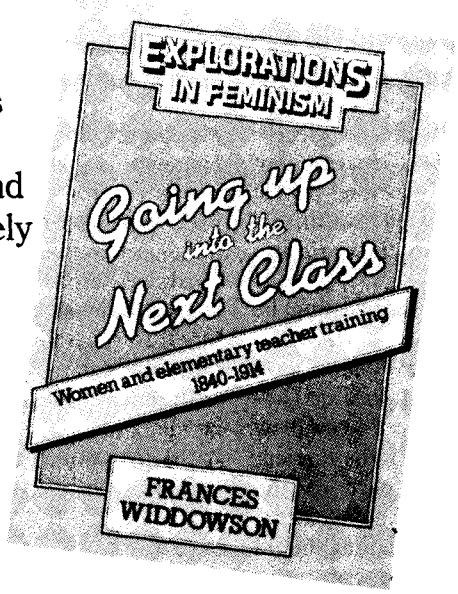
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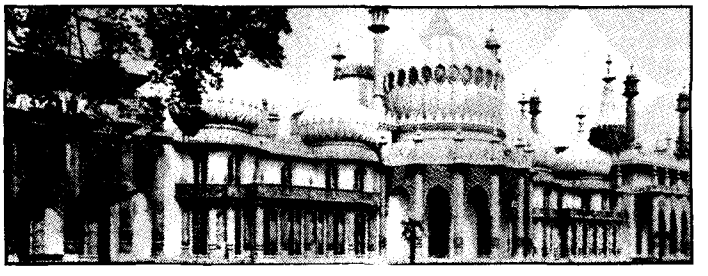

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The election result was a setback for disarmament. What are the prospects for CND?

Ian Davison

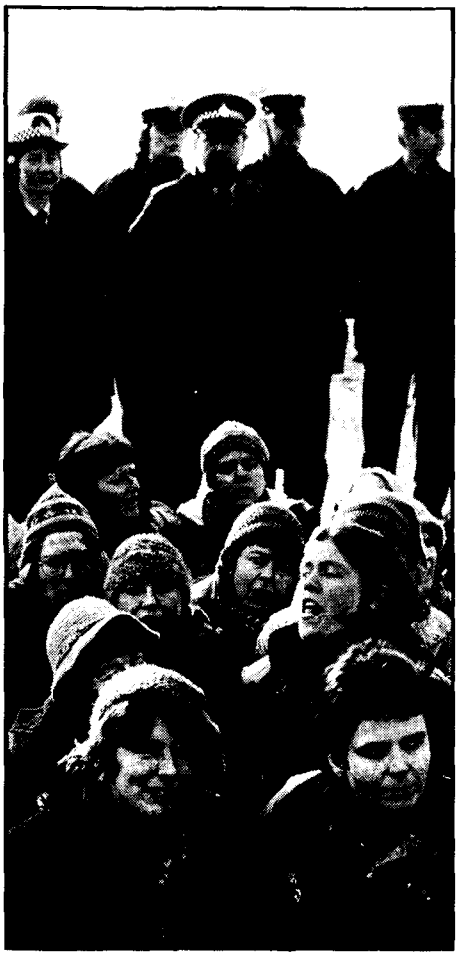
Will Protest Survive?

The justifiable but unrealistic anxiety that the Campaign for Nuclear Disarmament and its allies must have actual nuclear disarmament victories in Britain this year has been cooled off sharply by the Tory election water-cannon. The desperation for tangible results in 1983 had been questioned by some people for some time; the poor electoral pay off for CND's excellent campaigning has naturally accelerated a more realistic assessment of all the challenges facing nuclear disarmers. This article aims to describe polemically the difficulties which have been crystallising, to suggest why the public will still be anxious and sympathetic as CND gathers breath, and to speculate about the way forward in 1984.

Election problems

The independent intervention by CND during the general election itself was an amazing achievement for a single-issue campaign, particularly in the context of a snap election, and a first-past-the-post system which discourages single issue voting. In addition, because one particular political party, the Labour Party, had espoused, and even featured, so many of CND's policies, many activists, from that party especially, tended to work simply for the Labour candidate rather than for CND's policies; and media coverage for CND was minimised at British level, on the superficially reasonable ground that the CND voice seemed effectively pro-Labour.

CND itself was in a weak position to dispel this simple pro-Labour impression, because of the deadly mixture of CND purism and Labour sectarianism, which caused, for the period of the election, an impulsive reversal of CND's short term strategy of focusing public concentration on Cruise and Trident missiles. This strategy had made sense, to consolidate the growing public concern (indicated in opinion polls) about arms limitation, a concern which showed little sign of escalating quickly to actual disarmament demands, except among the activists themselves. Besides, this strategy had been successful in generating a mass disarmament movement supported in general by the people, and even by some media. CND also found itself crucified by conflicting desires; on the one hand to hang its immediate campaign on the topical and genuinely significant election peg, and on the other, to stay within the complex and very restrictive electoral laws. The resulting cautious generality of CND's publicity material at that time did nothing to dispove the notion that CND could be categorised as a Labour front.



However, CND's limitations seem mere rough edges compared with the woeful showing of Labour on many issues in the election, including disarmament. Much has been made, predictably and justifiably, of the tepid or treacherous performances of the labour right-wingers, and of the media preoccupation with the precise disarmament topics on which the Tories chose to fight and embarrass Labour.

But the Labour Left also caused problems. They wanted to fight this election, only one year after the patriotic and 'successful' Falklands war, about a completely nuclear-free Britain (within five years!). They refused to recognise the uneven but undoubted popular response to military firmness which had converted Mrs Thatcher from a thoroughly unpopular character into a heroic figure, a transformation recognised by all opinion polls. Disarmament issues were abused by the Left as a litmus test of Labour/socialist sincerity, in their struggles with the Right and with SDP defectors — thus helping to divert public attention from the escalatory warmongering of the Conservative government. Sincere nuclear disarmers in the Labour Pary were so fixated on how to make a right-wing Labour cabinet toe the line that they allowed the areas of doubt to become the *centre* of debate, instead of the simple question of which party was most likely to cause a nuclear war.

There are two dangers in this approach, both demonstrated in the election. One is tokenism, in the form of candidates equipped with only a CND badge and a few themes, who could neither defend the full nuclear disarmament package, nor mount an effective counter-attack on the indefensible Tory record of phoney 'multilateralism'. The other danger was that of a humiliating and lasting defeat for '*the* nuclear disarmament party'. And Labour did allow the Cruise-Trident asset to be transformed by ideological inflation into a liability in the disarmament area (see table).

The Labour Left is obviously correct in arguing that any policy can be made into public opinion, given effective campaigning in the communities; but not at short notice, with an inadequate political movement. The head of Labour's research department is not merely 'fudging' when he argues, 'The essential backcloth to our work must in future be an understanding of public opinion rather than *only* party conference policy. The issue here is not the sacrifice of our principles: it is the pace at which we can as democratic socialists, introduce socialist measures' (emphasis added).[1]

The actual result of the general election was not, of course, the product only of the disarmament/defence debate. However the outcome can only make disarmament work more painful — not only because of the determination of the re-elected government on the issue, but also because of the general social and political pessimism

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which will be engendered. We may also see attempts at impositions on oppositional activities, such as demonstration, privacy, 'incitements', 'conspiracies', and even insitutional resistance by local authorities to the civil defence charade. An associated trend appears to be what CND have described as 'a deliberate media blackout on CND's activities'. This was spectacularly exemplified when there was an almost complete failure to report a 10,000 strong demonstration in July, with a human chain linking the US and Soviet embassies. As CND commented, the media now seem to be looking for a decline in the peace movement and they are ignoring the movements continuing strength and successes.

***BRITISH DEFENCE POLICY**

Q. Do you agree or disagree with the following . . .		PERCENTAGES			
		ALL ELECTORS	SUPPORTERS CON	LAB	LIB/SDP
Britain should keep its own independent nuclear weapons	*AGREE*	74	88	62	73
	DISAGREE	20	8	30	22
	DON'T KNOW	6	4	8	4
Britain should not allow any new American nuclear arms like cruise to be based here	*AGREE*	55	37	71	68
	DISAGREE	32	46	22	23
	DON'T KNOW	13	17	7	9
Britain should close down all American nuclear bases in this country	*AGREE*	36	13	59	41
	DISAGREE	52	73	31	48
	DON'T KNOW	13	14	10	11
It would be dangerous for Britain to cut defence spending	*AGREE*	69	85	55	64
	DISAGREE	21	10	34	23
	DON'T KNOW	9	5	11	13

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Tactical problems

There are several problems for the peace movement, which are not so directly related to the election, but which require some attention. The campaign needs to present an integrated view of its short term demands, as a popular political package or 'project'. An attempt was made in this direction with the hurried espousal in 1982 of the demand for a nuclear weapons 'Freeze' or halt, but this has so far lacked a clearly defined image among activists themselves. The Freeze demand was imported from the US, where it usually takes a merely bilateral form (a mutual freeze by the US and USSR) in that very conservative environment. This has led to confusion in Britain, where the mass disarmament movement is in favour of independent measures of nuclear disarmament. Thus the concept of freeze, ill defined as it is, contributes to incoherence, rather than otherwise.

The attempt to link with the US freeze campaign is only one of CND's problems in the field of international relations. There is considerable fallout from CND's attempts at principled and non-aligned dialogue, especially through public events like the Berlin Conference and the Prague World Peace Conference. Such exercises are expensive in time, energy, finance and political goodwill. There is now an increased danger of CND people seeking external refuge from depressing local and national campaigning challenges, by resort to superficial notions and projects of 'internationalism'. Some people put great store by 'international contacts' to moderate the chauvinism which partly motivates public caution about programmes of national nuclear disarmament. But there are great difficulties in the way of ensuring positive domestic return for the effort — irrespective of whether the exercises are 'non-aligned' or marginally pro-socialist/Soviet or marginally anti-socialist/Soviet. In the context of the British road to nuclear disarmament, the true challenge is the winning of popular government action to limit nuclear weapons in Britain, and then reduce them, and then eliminate them.

Most internationally canvassed peace proposals tend to be in any case 'arms control' initiatives, concerned with 'balance', 'first use' of nuclear weapons and the like — which have the flavour of disarmament but none of its nutritional value, tending in the long run to legitimise nuclear weapons and create public complacency.

cooled off sharply by the Tory election water cannon

But having discounted 'internationalism' as the major tool against British chauvinism and militarist assumptions, we nevertheless have to acknowledge that emotions and ideological habits are causes as well as effects of the level of military power in Britain. Our ability to deal with this aspect of ruling class hegemony will depend partly on the intellectual power with which we question and supplant these assumptions; but more crucially on our ability to translate new perceptions into a fine-meshed net of colloquial and popular epigrams and slogans. This process is at present made very difficult by habits of linguistic snobbery. The peace movement, like the Left is infected by the bourgeois and bureaucratic assumption that some social concepts actually require educated language and jargon. The other element in this problem is gentility — the inhibition about being combative and assertive, even in appropriate situations and modes. The inhibition is reinforced, especially in the search for 'peace', by pacifist and libertarian ideas on non-violent personal lifestyles and political methods. CND has therefore laboured long and rather defensively with the militarist counter-attack during the past year. The assault has consisted of: key 'common sense' assumptions and false analogies, such as 'military/nuclear balance', 'negotiation from strength', 'nuclear blackmail' and 'deterrence'; blatant historical distortions, for example about appeasement; multiple misrepresentation of CND policy as for instance 'one sided disarmament'; and accusations of control, or unwarranted influence by, Communists, Labourites, feminists, or worse.

CND and its allies are well enough equipped to debunk the biased briefings and presentations of 'facts', but less comfortable altogether in coping directly and briefly with damaging and unscrupulous rough-housing by such exponents as Heseltine.

Gathering breath

However these largely internal problems among active nuclear disarmers do not preoccupy most citizens. Public concern is about the two key aspects of the nuclear arms race — tension and escalation. These conditions will continue and intensify, so that the movement will have a willing audience still, as it gets its act together again. For instance, the appalling UN record of the British government on multilateral arms control and limitation[2] will be better known. The chairman of NATO's military committee, Admiral Falls, admits 'We can't expect to go on gaining the support of the people of NATO if we rely too much on nuclear weapons

[1] Report to Labour Party general secretary, quoted in *Observer* 24 July 1983.
[2] See *Sanity* August 1983.

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and don't explain what we are doing.'[3] The first strike potential of air-launched and sea-launched Cruise missiles will certainly soon worry people just as much as ground-launched Cruise and Pershing already have. Increasing computerisation, and consequent military rather than political control of NATO nuclear systems will comfort no-one, any more than renewed activity in Anti-Ballistic-Missile systems, and anti-submarine warfare. But above all it is the political tension which continues to produce anxiety, for example the Soviet perception that 'American policies must be understood as preparation for nuclear conflict and as a demonstration of a readiness and desire to unleash it'.[4]

In this political environment of tension, anxiety, and accelerating arms spiral, CND has been showing the necessary signs of reconsolidation. There have been fairly effective reviews of the election campaign, and there is capacity for self criticism. CND's mobilising capacity was demonstrated by the immense and rapid literature distribution during the election. There have been successful major events in June and July. There has developed some acceptance of the need for a long-haul campaign and clear themes that have emerged for the national demonstration in London on October 22nd. There will be a re-invigoration of the door to door peace canvas campaign, and freshly informed local lobbying of MPs. Plans are being laid for an avowedly 'symbolic' large-scale non-violent direct action against Cruise missiles in December. Finally, a number of measures are being taken to improve CND's organisation in the centre, in the regions and in the groups.

The way forward in 1984

To speculate first on political themes: the concept of the Nuclear Freeze should be increasingly valuable for making a coherent aim out of all the short term nuclear arms limitation demands. However it should be made very clear firstly that in the British context, the nuclear freeze is to be independent, unconditional and immediate, and secondly that the Freeze concept is quite distinct from cosmetic arms control measures, such as the dual control of Cruise missiles, or reductions in the Trident warheads[5] etc, etc. The Freeze can sustain and sharpen public support which already exists for Britsh nuclear arms limitation (see Table 1). By 1984 it will be essential to give more prominence (within the overall Freeze campaign) to the British Trident system, which will continue to be the likeliest major success for CND, all the more desirable after the probable deployment of Cruise missiles.

The second broad theme which should now be considered is *freedom from American nuclear bases*. Public opinion is responsive to this demand (see Table 1). Provided that the British Freeze demand is also posed, the danger of British nuclear nationalism (or a European version) can be headed off, so that the elements of chauvinism can be transformed into elements of mass anti-imperialism, in effect rather than in name.

A third political theme to consider is the general military and economic uselessness of nuclear weapons. A wide need is felt for a reply in the medium term to the accusation that a non nuclear Britain would be 'defenceless', and perhaps the reply has to be well tested and developed before a nuclear-weapon-free Britain becomes a prominent demand (again). We should however be very cautious about posing the theme in too defensive a way: as the need for 'alternatives' to nuclear weapons. The Tories have posed this need for an alternative, but CND needs to make clear that nuclear weapons are no defence. So there should not be too much concentration on non-nuclear defence, and non-nuclear jobs conversion. Some studies have been produced on these topics, but we must not panic in these directions. At the end of the day, these are questions of special concern to specialist constituencies, and the relevant people should deal with them, as they will. We should vigorously deny the right of hypocritical pro-nuclear and anti-employee Tories even to raise such questions, far less set the terms of the nuclear weapons debate around them.

the flavour of disarmament but none of its nutritional value

CND in its general work should not appear to concede either that British nuclear weapons could be an effective, continuing form of 'defence' or that they are a tolerable or even effective form of job creation project. We should continue mainly to pour scorn on such projects.

Sometimes the issue of nuclear-weapons jobs is raised by left-wingers and trade union activists themselves as part of an approach to the labour movement. This can endanger the breadth and unity of the movement, which extends beyond trade unionists and far beyond workers directly employed in the arms industries. But the maintenance of the broad alliance for nuclear disarmament precludes an overall reliance on, or intimate identification of style with either the trade unions or the Left parties.

However, there should be a special role in the nuclear disarmament movement for marxists with their presumed analytical habits allied with instincts and strong sympathies for mass politics. Firstly they should try to ensure that minority direct action of a directly obstructive kind, whether industrial or physical, does not undermine mass action, whether indirect boycotting, tax refusals etc, or traditionally demonstrative, propagandist and lobbying. Class conscious marxists should also help develop in the campaign a popular style which allows effective communication with people of non-academic habits: a style which is frank, assertive, clear and simple. □

[3] Quoted in *Morning Star* 21 June 1983.
[4] Member of Central Committee 'brains trust', quoted in the *Observer* 24 July 1983.
[5] See Michael Heseltine, *Hansard* 19 July 1983.

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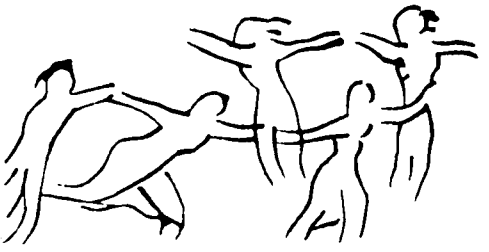

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Channel Five

An interview with SALMAN RUSHDIE

by Anita Phillips

Salman Rushdie was born in Bombay in 1947 and lived there until he was 14 when he came to Britain. His Booker prize-winning novel, *Midnight's Children*, describes the period of India's independence. His new novel, *Shame*, centred on Pakistan, is published this month. Here he talks to Anita Phillips.

Did your last novel, Midnight's Children, *do as well in India, as it did here?*

Yes. I've been pirated, which rarely happens unless you're Harold Robbins.

Because of the way you write, because your work is very funny, and also because it uses myth and legend and things people can enjoy, I wondered if you felt that Westerner reading your writing could switch off from the kind of points you are making?

Maybe. There's always the danger of that. Certainly it is true that *Midnight's Children* has not really been read in the West as a political novel. People have mentioned that it has political content but in India and Pakistan it is read *mainly* as a political novel. It seems to me quite likely that a lot of the people who have read it have read it as a fairy tale. But then one can't prescribe to readers why they should read your book or how they should read it and if they get a little of what I was trying to do then that is good.

How do Indian readers discuss Midnight's Children?

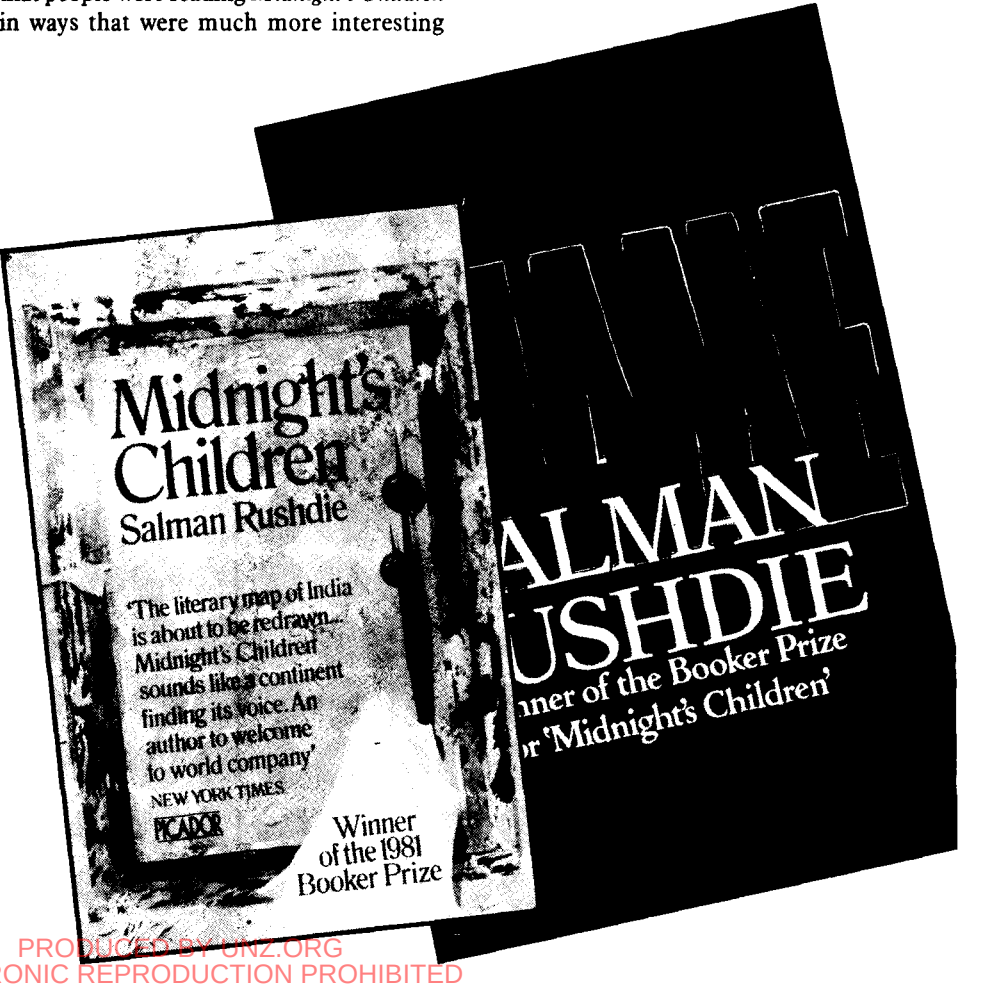
For a start they are much more knowledgeable and their conversation would begin where frequently a conversation in Britain would end. For instance, in Britain people would want to know about Hindu mythology in the book, and I would explain about the god Ganesh and all that. In India, of course, everybody knows about the god Ganesh and they know all about the mythology and how it is used in the book, and they discuss the use of it, so it's a much more interesting conversation. Also, of course, everybody knows about the political events that the book deals with in very, very great detail — nobody asks me questions about the emergency. Most of them had lived through it after all, so that the political arguments were also much more interesting because they were arguments from knowledge, from experience rather than from newspapers or books.

There are things in *Midnight's Children* that Western readers simply don't get and they would never get them unless they were immersed in Indian culture. Indians get them automatically. So there are some losses for Western readers. Maybe there are also losses for Indian readers because some of the literary background of *Midnight's Children* is very much Western and comes out of a Western comic tradition, and maybe Indian readers don't relate to that part of it as much. However, the thing about literate Indians is that they have a much greater knowledge of Western culture than literate Westerners have of Indian culture. So, in a way, Indian readers who are versed in literature probably can read both Western and Eastern sides of the novel quite easily so they are probably the best readers.

The thing that I discovered in India was that people were reading *Midnight's Children* in ways that were much more interesting than I had written, and it became important for me not to kill their book. It can become dangerous to explain your book because it becomes a way of prescribing it for people. For instance, a university student was talking about the boatman at the beginning of *Midnight's Children* and had constructed him into a kind of Charon figure, a kind of hell's boatman, a figure leading people from innocence to experience. He had all kinds of ideas about this boatman which had not been in my head when I wrote. I really had to bite my tongue because I suddenly thought it would be very easy for me to say: 'No, I don't think like that, that's not it, it's this', and that would have been like stabbing his idea with a pin. If an author tells you you are wrong, there's a tendency to believe you *are* wrong but you are not necessarily wrong at all.

Your new novel Shame *isn't a realist novel any more than* Midnight's Children *was?*

No. I was reading Brecht recently and it seemed to me he said a very interesting thing. He said that normally when people talk about realism and fantasy they talk about them as though these were aesthetic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points. The choice of form is not simply about aesthetics, it's also a kind of politics and a kind of ethics. That's to say, one does not have to write naturalistically in order to write realistically. There could be forms of experience which require you to break with naturalism, which, after all, is only one of many conventions. I don't like the word fantasy, because it implies an escape from the real world — you know, that it's a flight of fancy — and I don't think that's what I try to do. I tried to learn from my first novel, that to allow the imagination unfettered reign is a mistake, or at least it only works when it starts with roots in the real world which you don't tear up. I see the use of that kind of heightened imaginative writing as a way of intensifying reality and not of escaping from it. I think that is more or less what happens in *Midnight's Children* and I think it's much more so in *Shame*, which, I think, is the most intense writing I've ever done. That's not to praise it but just to describe it: it's a very highly charged piece of work.

Would you say that you had taken things from Gabriel Garcia Marquez in writing Shame*?*

I think that the connection with Marquez has been very much overdone. My writing doesn't feel to me like his. I think he fantasises much more than I do. When he comments on actuality he always transforms it into something else. His comments tend to be more oblique. I am talking about his fiction. And I think basically his vision comes out of a rural sensibility because that is how he grew up, and the magic of his writing comes out of that, out of giving more importance to that kind of superstitious, miracle believing, magical view of the world, than to a rational, realistic view of the world. It's that kind of inversion which gives him his quality. And it seems to me that just as much as he is a kind of rural boy, I'm a city boy. Most of my writing I would see as being directly urban in sensibility and in India it is criticised for that because 75% of the population live in small villages. So if you write a big city novel, you have actually not written about India at all. If you really want to describe what India is like for the masses, you have to get outside the cities, because there is a proletariat in India but it is tiny by comparison with the rural peasantry. So I think it's perfectly fair criticism of *Midnight's Children* that although it claims to be dealing with India as a subject it is actually dealing with only a small part.

The quality of daily life in South America appears to be very similar to the quality of daily life in India. Both societies have similar structures, both have dictators, both have a colonial heritage and both have the problem of a language they use which was imported from outside by the colonists. I was talking to Mario Vargas Llosa, who was over here, about this, and the more we discussed the way in which the societies are connected to each other it really did seem that they are very, very similar. They have different histories and different imperialists, but they have so many points of connection, that it seemed to me not surprising that writing about them also has those points of connection. *Shame* contained dictators and corrupt politicians and all that, but it isn't because I want to write like Garcia Marquez, it's because they are there. And they seem just as difficult to ignore in the East as they do in Latin America, and they are remarkably similar breeds of people. I suspect that the military dictator is a kind of universal archetype and whether Chilean or Pakistani, I think you will find enormous points of contact in the way in which they operate and the way in which they think.

What particular difficulties did the writing of Shame *present?*

One of the problems with Pakistan, particularly, is that of its 30 odd years of independent history, it's almost never had a free society. Almost never had a social environment in which people could write, (fiction or journalism) which openly discussed the nature and problems of the society. There has almost always been some form of censorship. So that it's as though all the books that should have been written in the past three decades have not been written because there has been very little opportunity to write them. The exception to this is poetry because in Pakistan the poets have got a very distinguished record

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of speaking up in spite of the personal danger. So it's not to say there has been no literary protest. There has been, the great poets have been carrying the flag. But that's about it, really. So in writing *Shame* one had the bizarre feeling of operating in completely virgin territory. It may be only because I don't live there, and therefore thay can't get me, that I'm able to do it. That was a very odd feeling — it's a feeling which a writer here writing about Britain could never have. The idea of being in a place without maps, being in a place where nobody had been before. That is why I felt the need in the book to discuss the reality as well as the fiction, because I felt, that it's not as though one is moving into a literary area where there are already conventions, signposts, traditions and things. So one needs to talk about the process of mapping as well as simply telling a story. And anyway, I wanted to see what happened in a text if you take a fictional way and a non-fictional way of treating the same material, and allow them to sit next to each other and see whether that is productive or not. There is relatively little of the non-fictional stuff anyway, it just comes up in a couple of pages now and then, and I think if it was more than that it would get very irritating. There was initially a little bit more of it and I took some out because it felt superfluous. But the reason it is still in there is because I thought it *was* helping, it *was* providing some kind of context and some kind of extra perspective.

One difficulty I felt when reading Shame *was with your female characters, which seemed to be almost entirely gossips, whores or bitches?*

The men aren't that nice either. The reason that book was so difficult to write, in a way, was that it's talking about an almost completely decadent class. There really are no conventionally nice people in *Shame*, very few characters who you would think of as being sympathetic and I don't think the women were singled out for special treatment. I think the men are, if anything, much more unpleasant than the women. I'm much fonder of the women in *Shame*, in spite of everything. The men seem to me to be kind of irredeemable.

The point is that there are an awful lot of women in those kinds of societies, Moslem society, who are distorted by social repression and who behave very oddly. It's a society which is almost totally sexually repressed. As a result there are very large numbers of whores which nobody ever talks about, because you're not allowed to, because they officially don't exist. A lot of women are very gossipy, bitchy and backstabbing and lost in material possessions, incapable of any kind of normal emotional relationship. The men have similar distortions. One of the things that the book is about is the relationships between the sexes in that society, relationships which are based upon power, and the connection between these and the existence of dictatorships in the country. One of the things that started me off on the book was that here is a country which for 30 out of 35 years has been a dictatorship of one kind or another, and there comes a point when you can't blame that on bad luck.

Of course people with guns are more powerful than people without guns. But that's not all it is, there must be something about the society which goes some way to explaining why there is so little resistance to the dictator when he rises? And I'm not just talking about this one, there have been several. What is it about the society that allows these things to keep happening? The more I thought about it, the more it came down to a level of corruption, a level of intellectual and moral corruption amongst the ruling elite of such an intensity that it's almost impossible to believe, and it reads like fantasy when you put it down, except to someone who knows Pakistan, to whom none of that will seem like exaggeration. The Pakistani ruling class really is the most grotesquely corrupt and morally bankrupt class. When that entire class is beyond hope then you arrive at a situation where there is just about no exit. And no matter how you analyse the situation you can't see a happy ending.

You know that if Zia falls, there will be another general. That if the generals fall and there were an election and the Bhutto party came back to power, there would be a different kind of dictator and they would kill lots of people and then the army would come back in and there would be more killing — it seems like a situation from which there is no door out. You can't imagine what breaks the cycle.

The most sympathetic character in the book seemed to be the half-wit girl?

Yes. In the book somewhere it discusses why I made her a half-wit because I wasn't initially planning to, she sort of became it. There are moments when characters take over and she *became* a half-wit and then I thought there were reasons for doing it, because she is the only pure character in the book, although she does the worst things. But she also seems to me the one who is innocent and that paradox makes her the most important character. One of the things that it came out of was thinking about the connection between humiliation and violence, which seems to me to be fairly direct. If you keep on humiliating people there's a point where they become capable of violence, even if they are not violent people. I think that was one of the lessons of the riots in London a couple of years ago. When the kids were rioting on the streets, and you went and asked them a couple of days later, they were all amazed they did it. 'Who us? We don't do that sort of thing'. There is a point where if you go on over years and years and years piling humiliation on people, then people who are completely peaceful suddenly do outrageously violent things and they can't understand it themselves.

So I wondered what would happen if you take that as a notion and intensify it. If you have a figure who is that girl, who is abnormal and, because the book exaggerates, receptive to this kind of emotion, humiliation, shame, embarrassment and all that. The effect of this is to create in her a huge violence which she can't control and which gets bigger and bigger and which becomes habit forming as violence does. So she does it for its own sake, because again, in the book somewhere, it discusses the genesis of the idea. What happens when you think of yourself as the one who gets the sand kicked in your face and suddenly you hit people and they stay hit. First you're amazed at yourself and then you're a little bit pleased. And that makes it more possible for you to do it again. Just a little bit more. Violence is a very seductive thing and I think it's important to know that about it.

What traditions or movements in literature do you feel closest to?

I was reading an essay by Milan Kundera, a writer whom I admire enormously. I quote him in *Shame*. Kundera says you can basically divide the history of European literature into the strain of development that comes down from Samuel Richardson and *Clarissa* on the one hand, and on the other hand the development out of *Tristam Shandy*. What he is saying is that the possibilities that Sterne demonstrated have been very little explored. It's not as though

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the novel has exhausted all its possibilities. Very few people have gone down that road.

I think it probably is true that that kind of writing, psychological verisimilitude, has inherited the earth as far as Western literature is concerned, and that other kinds of literature as play — writing which is iconoclastic by virtue of being playful, but which can be subversive without taking itself seriously — have really been explored very little. Kundera himself does it. There are people who have done it. I think early Beckett did it. Novels like *Murphy* and *Watt* come into that category. I admire that really because it is serious clowning. The point about serious clowning is that it does not admit it's serious, not that it doesn't admit its clowning. The idea that something can be important without being serious is something which Western literary criticism has run away from.

Are there any kinds of writing you really dislike?

No, not really. You see I could quite easily see myself at some point writing a novel which would fall entirely within the category of naturalism, if those were the techniques that the subject demanded. For instance, at the moment what I'm trying quite hard to do is to find a way of moving, of exporting what I'm writing from over there to over here because it seems to me proper that, at some point, the writing should begin to reflect my experience of the move between cultures and the clash between the cultures. I'm not just talking about writing about immigrants but about what it is like to bring one culture into the middle of another and what kind of frictions operate both ways between the two. I don't know how to do this yet. It will require, I suspect, very different techniques from anything that I have yet done. I don't think that I've got so deeply set into a groove that I'll just go on doing that. This is why I wouldn't reject any kind of writing. There may be a time when one has to do it. Maybe the way to write about Britain in the 1980s is to write like Stendhal rather than like Joyce, one doesn't know, but it might be, and again one doesn't want to prescribe because that may be the way for me to do it, and not the way for someone else. So I don't think one should become exclusive about writing. What I like about literature is that you can admire so many different kinds of writing.

PAUL ROBESON: MILITANT HUMANISM

Richard Dyer

Paul Robeson was the first really major black star and also an unambiguous and outspoken socialist. For younger people today, he may be little more than a name, if that. To get something of the measure of the Robeson phenomenon, you have to imagine someone as handsome as Sidney Poitier, as folksy as Bob Dylan, and as laying-it-on-the-line as Vanessa Redgrave, and as big a star as any of them at their height. It was remarkable enough that a black person should become as big a star as he was in the period from the late 20s to the early 40s, and incredible that he should be 'political' too. How did it happen?

One explanation of his success is simply the extraordinary record of his achievements. He was a brilliant scholar at Rutgers and Columbia universities (the only black student in each), a great American football player (regarded as one of the best quarter backs in the game's history), a critically acclaimed actor in the theatre, his *Othello* being still the longest run of a Shakespeare play in Broadway history. He was the most successful male singer of Negro spirituals, his records best sellers, his concerts sell outs. The showbiz standard *Old Man River* was written for him and always thought of as his song. None of his films are quite in this league, but he did make *Body and Soul* with the most important black film-maker of the 20s, Oscar Micheaux, the remarkable avant-garde film *Borderline*, the spectacular 1935 film version of *Show Boat*, and a string of (mostly) worthy British films, several of which were shown at the National Film Theatre this June (including the infamous *Sanders of the River* that he himself repudiated at its premiere). All of this is only the publicly known tip of the iceberg of the incredible range of talents and successes. Yet talent has never guaranteed that anyone becomes a star, while success is stardom rather than a cause of it. All of this is not enough to explain the phenomenon of Robeson's stardom.

Another explanation of it is that he simply had a beautiful voice. Certainly it is the beauty of that rich, deep, sonorous bass voice that everyone agrees on, whether or not they are socialists, whether or not they think he was a good actor, wherever they stand on the various political and artistic disagreements that surround Robeson. But, again, many people have beautiful voices who do not become stars (just as many people with vile ones do), and besides beauty is rather decisively in the ear of the listener. It is what most people heard in that voice that made Robeson a star, and later that undid him.

In the period of his greatest success, the 30s, what people heard was the sufferings of the Negro people. The sonorous depth of his tone seemed to bear the weight of centuries of oppression; it was a plangent voice, resonant and mournful. White audiences tended to think of it as a natural voice and to prefer *Old Man River* or *Nobody Knows the Troubles I've Seen*, songs

Robeson gives voice and dignity to the suffering of black people in Showboat, *1928.*

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Channel Five

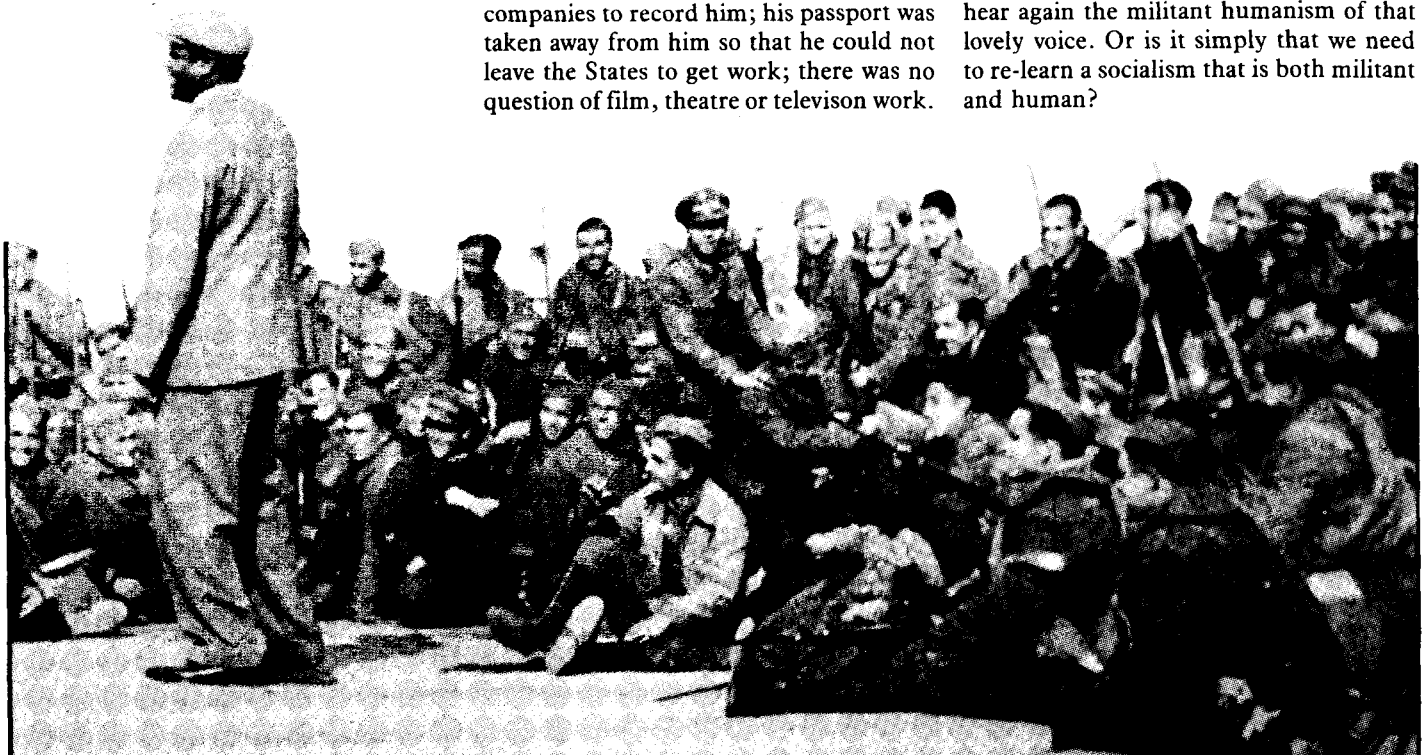
that suggest an eternal lot of suffering, the black person's destiny of nobility in tribulation. Black audiences (and some white socialists) might hear something of the protest against slavery that the lyrics of the spirituals spoke of in disguised forms (eg, the frequent use of river imagery that suggests to white listeners the eternal value of life's tears, but was in fact a reference to rivers of escape or the ocean across which lay the homeland, Africa). And to black ears the deep resonances could be a booming anger, a fierce resentment. In other words, this apparently simple and beautiful voice could be heard differently by different audiences, all of whom could nonetheless feel that what they were responding to was, simply, simplicity and beauty.

As he became more directly involved politically, first through left theatre work (including work at the Unity Theatre in London in the 30s) and then more explicitly, singing at rallies, appearing on demos, working with radical groups, he tried to resist some of the ways people had heard his voice. The original version of *Old Man River* begins 'There's an old man called the Mississippi, that's the old man that I'd like to be' and Robeson was always associated with Old Man River; but he tried to resist this by singing instead 'That's the old man I don't want to be.' Later in the song he sang that far from being 'weary and sick of trying', as in the original, he would be 'struggling until I'm dying'. He refused to make any more films to be used as the beautiful, docile black man unthreatening to white audiences.

Robeson's early cultural activities were always political — the choice of the spirituals as a dignified expression of how black people saw the world was a radical statement in the context of white images of black people as cheerful minstrels, harmless sambos and mammies or rampaging bucks. Equally in his later career, when he was more obviously political, what he was doing culturally was still political. He continued to sing spirituals but also folk songs of all nations, out of a cultural and political commitment to internationalism. He tried to show in his singing that the music of oppressed peoples is the same the world over and expressive of a basic common humanity. This kind of humanistic internationalism is not very fashionable on the Left currently, partly because it often seems to evade the reality of differences between classes, nations, races, genders and so on. Nonetheless it was the inspirational rhetoric of the Left, the feeling that kept you going, and Robeson was the embodiment of it.

He had to pay the price for his more direct espousal of socialist and civil rights politics. In the 50s, concert hall managements refused to book him, record companies to record him; his passport was taken away from him so that he could not leave the States to get work; there was no question of film, theatre or televison work. He had refused to be Old Man River, the comfortable reminder to whites that blacks had suffered beautifully, movingly, unalterably. And many militant black activists in the 50s and 60s began to be doubtful about him too. His rejection of jazz seemed like a rejection of the dangerous, subversive traditions of black culture in favour of the safe, peaceable, whitewashed spirituals. His stress on international working class solidarity did not sit easily with a politics based primarily on a more or less separatist ethnic identity.

He is still a controversial figure. On the Left there are those for whom he did no wrong — but the terms of their praise, their references to 'the sheer humanity of the man' and so on, have little resonance for the fragmented and anti-humanist rhetoric of the post-60s generation. On the Right, he's become Old Man River again. The only record you can get easily (*The Best of Paul Robeson,* EMI NTS 181) only has songs that fit this image — fake African songs from the British movies, anodyne ballads, the softer spirituals and *Old Man River* itself. The only way you can get to hear him on the radio is on the programmes of people like David Jacobs and Richard Baker, and they never play the militant versions of *Old Man River,* or the grittier spirituals, or *The Ballad of Joe Hill.* Perhaps we should write in and ask them to. Certainly we need to learn to hear again the militant humanism of that lovely voice. Or is it simply that we need to re-learn a socialism that is both militant and human?



Robeson entertaining the troops of the International Brigade, Spain 1937.

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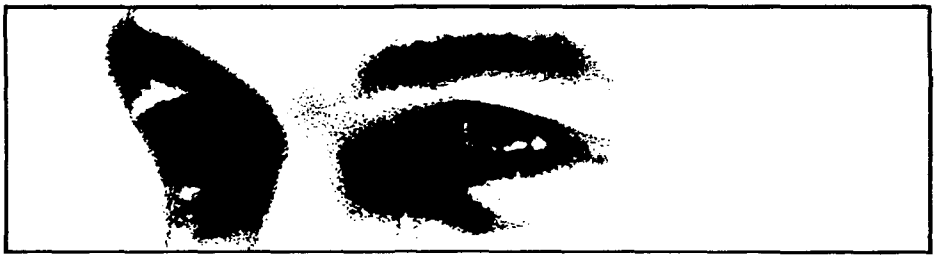
LATIN AMERICA: THE NEW CINEMA

Michael Chanan



Over the last 25 years, cinema in the developed countries has been displaced by television, to such an extent that some have prophesied the total demise of cinema as a separate form. Like so many other predictions about the effects of technological innovation, however, this is only a view from within the metropolis. In other parts of the world the prospects are often very different, and in Latin America, over the same period, a new cinema has emerged, largely outside both television and the commercial film industry, which has opened up exciting new possibilities for the use of film, the development of its languages and styles, and its relationship with the audience. This autumn provides a number of opportunities, with screenings on Channel Four, at the NFT and other venues in London and one or two places around the country, for getting to know something of this movement.

When the new Latin American films first began to arrive in Europe in the 60s, at film festivals and in art cinemas, it wasn't just their strange expressive power that was found so impressive, but also a special kind of discovery they gave their audiences — the discovery of home truths. Home truths for two reasons: because these were the first films from Latin America to show what Latin American countries are like as homelands, countries to live in, and also because in so doing they came home to *us* and showed us that we had to think again about our own countries, the home territories of transnational corporate capitalism — which include of course, the major US film distributors, every one of which is now a subsidiary of one or other of the leading conglomerates.

Monopoly control of the screens by the North American distributors, which they already achieved in the silent days, had prevented real film industries emerging in any but the largest Latin American countries: Mexico, Brazil and Argentina. These were the only countries big enough, it seemed, for local producers to be able to recover their production costs on the home market. Even those industries never found it easy, except for brief periods. Because Hollywood got its money back first from what used to be the largest home market in the world, the North American distributors could easily afford to rent their films abroad cut-price, and Latin American producers were forced, by this undercutting, to keep their budgets and production values down.

On top of that, since making and distributing prints of films costs very little relative to the costs of producing them, almost every peso Hollywood took home was extra profit. But surplus profits are precisely what attract the backing of the bankers, and in this way Hollywood was able to consolidate its hold on the market by continually raising its own production values.

The Latin American industries could hardly compete. For them, the doors of the banks were closed. Film production even in the three big countries was much too risky, and besides, most of the banks were North American anyway. Lacking in both resources and expertise, it was all the producers could do, with the closed mentality of the colonised and dependent creole bourgeoisie, to imitate the Hollywood genres and invent a few of their own — musicals, comedies, and in Brazil nowadays, the pornographic combination of the two known as *pornochanchada*.

The new cinema grew up in militant opposition to all this. In his manifesto, *The Aesthetics of Hunger*, the Brazilian director Glauber Rocha wrote about how people for whom hunger is a normal condition are suffering violence — the violence of the social system that makes them go hungry. We know, he said, 'this hunger will not be cured by moderate reforms, and its tumours are not hidden but only aggravated by the cloak of technicolor'. The movement was accompanied from the outset by theoretical reflection; critical magazines appeared in several countries and the film makers themselves have been the leading contributors to the debate about the values and uses of the film medium.

The dates and places are those of the recent history of Latin America. Cuban cinema is synonymous with the Cuban Revolution, Chilean cinema with Salvador Allende and the Government of Popular Unity tragically cut short just ten years ago. But now there's Nicaragua and El Salvador, and the rebirth of the idea of militant cinema which was first developed in the 60s, the decade of Che Guevara.

With the development of a variety of alternative distribution practices, both the response of audiences and the attacks on film makers by the official and unofficial agents of authoritarian governments clearly spell out how much the new cinema is needed, and how subversive the representations it provides of the reality of the continent. The movement displays a good deal of ingenuity in adapting to local political and economic conditions — it has to, in order to survive. But it hasn't just done that. There is, for example, a new women's cinema emerging in several countries. The catalogue of films shown in the Havana Film Festival in its four years so far, includes close on a hundred films made by some sixty women directors, or co-directors working with men.

Perhaps the most eloquent statement of the movement's sense of purpose is the view of the pioneering Cuban director, Julio García Espinosa, who is now head of the Cuban Film Institute, ICAIC: 'since in our social aspirations we're looking for better ways to fulfil human self-realisation, so we have to look for the appropriate cinema. For me, the societies of the great metropolis are marked by an economy of waste, with a corresponding culture of waste. We cannot — the world cannot — aspire to such levels of consumption. Therefore culture has to provide new ways of feeling and enjoying life, different from irrational consumption. Since we're creating a society which in spite of its imperfections will finally achieve a new kind of human productiveness, I have suggested a cinema which, though it may be technically or aesthetically 'imperfect', is essentially much more consistent with real human needs.'[1]

[1] From *New Cinema of Latin America*, which will be transmitted on Channel Four on October 3 and 10, in *Eleventh Hour*, as part of the Latin American film season.

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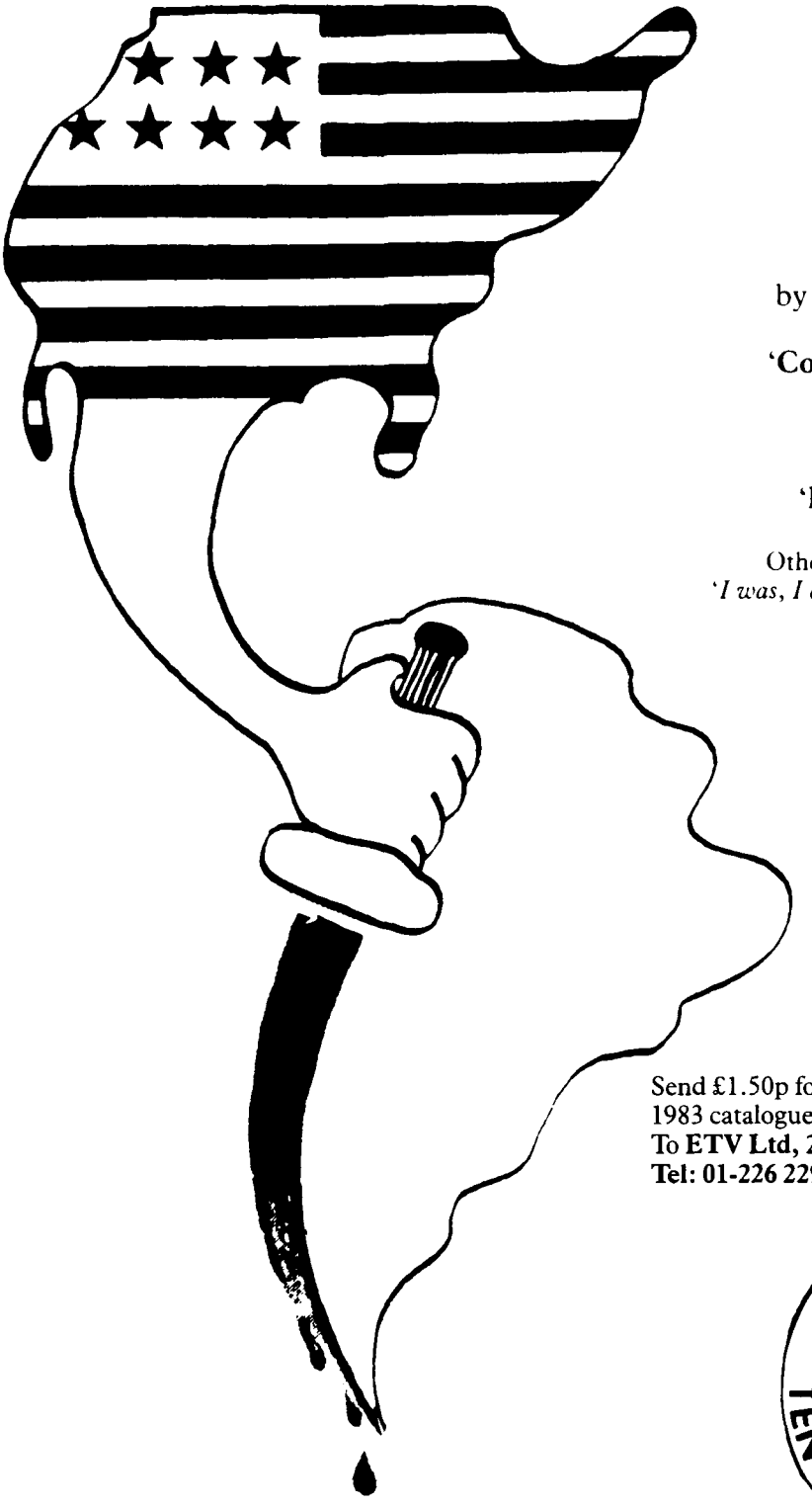

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Reviews

ARGUMENTS FOR SOCIALISM SERIES
Pluto Press, 1982-83 pbk £2.50 each

Two weeks after the general election which returned the most virulent opponents of socialist control and democracy to a new and more fearsome reign, Tony Benn was bravely writing in the *Guardian* about the media's silence over the remarkable achievement that 'for the first time since 1945 a political party with an openly socialist policy has received the support of over 8½ million people.' Tariq Ali was reminding us with stern fortitude in *Time Out* that the Tories' 'landslide victory' was snatched out of 30.8% of the actual vote. In the face of defeat it seemed we were to muster optimism of the intellect as well as of the will.

Yet for some, the Labour Party's defeat demands confrontation with harsh truths: that socialism in the form in which it was communicated to the people held no attraction as a force for change; that the working class could be won by Thatcher's harsh free-market individualism because it wasn't going to accept a paternalist and moribund ideology, preached at them by the young professionals who form the majority of labour party activists.

It is clear that the issue of developing popular support for socialism at the same time as reconstructing the aims, principles and practices which go to make up socialist politics, is an extremely vital one at the present moment. Unless the process of defeat becomes reversed, we do not only have to survive the present government, but have to face a continuation and escalation of reactionary and repressive politics. It is into this arena that Pluto's series *Arguments for Socialism* is trying to step.

There appear to be two strategies which the books attempt with varying degrees of emphasis and success; first, in response to the unpopularity of socialism, they give a forum for progressive politics which hopes to be an accessible one. To this end all the publications are cheap, short and written with a commitment to avoiding both academic style and doctrinaire rhetoric. Second, they tackle the project of questioning what should and could be the aspirations of socialists. So they want to be provocative rather than familiar, to bring new life into tired beliefs by opening up discussion on the content of oppositional politics. As Garry Whannel argues in one of the more interesting books, *Blowing the whistle: the politics of sport*, socialists in the 50s and 60s attributed the failure of socialism to become genuinely popular to rising affluence. Yet under Thatcherism there has been a real decline in living standards without a consequent decline in support for the government 'even with people who suffer most from current government policies . . . Working class people do not automatically turn to socialism any more than women automatically turn to feminism. . . The last 15 years have seen a growth in interest in problems of ideology — of how people in subordinate classes come to consent to, and acquiesce in, class domination' (p13). Whannel argues that retaining an understanding of the core of socialist analysis as dealing with the class struggle in the workplace, forces a paralysis on questions of allegiance or resistance to capitalist and patriarchal systems of control.

Within a short review it is impossible to deal with each of the titles so I have picked three which I think succeed in some or all of the aims discussed above. They can be contrasted favourably with others such as *Due South: socialists and world development* (Jeremy Hill and Hilary Scannell) and *Hard Times: the world economy in turmoil* (Bob Sutcliffe), which produce a mixture of predictable arguments, for example against import controls (seen as depriving Third World workers of jobs and encouraging backward nationalism); an over-reliance on streams of statistics, which are hard to read or digest; and a pervading pessimism over not only how dire the capitalist crisis is, but how difficult it is to change.

However in Dexter Whitfield's *Making it Public: evidence and action against privatisation*, progressive change is neither banished to the realm of never-never, nor are the obstacles to constructing democratic, efficient and popular public services underestimated. I read the book as addressed to trade unionists and community activists — an attempt to perhaps widen the circle out from already-committed socialists, but because there is a clear sense of audience, a relatively complex discussion of strategy and tactics is presented. I very much liked the combination of tackling contradictions within the welfare state and pursuing ideas for campaigning activities which make the book a useful handbook for activists.

As Whitfield points out, 'traditional trade union economism will not stop privatisation. . . Escalating strike action will not necessarily increase the possibility of winning a campaign. Because privatisation is a political attack, it is essential to organise, build support and take direct action with the users of services' (p88). He gives the example in 1981 of a committee of tenants and direct labour organisation shop stewards being set up in Hackney to look at the problems of repair and maintenance on council estates. Only by uniting public service workers and users could support be won for resisting cuts. As the aftermath of 'the winter of discontent' showed, we ignore user support at our peril.

Gaining this support has to include confronting inadequacies and repressive mechanisms within state provision. Users experience a range of red tape, queues, and the stigma of being labelled and treated as either 'scroungers' or as inadequate to deal

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with their own problems. Given a political climate which is shifting people into cruder and more brutal forms of individualism, it is hardly surprising that health insurance schemes become seen as attractive and realistic alternatives. Only the poorest remain to suffer the public services, while the rest scurry to claim immunity from what is often experienced as oppressive state control or public hostility to dependence on the state.

Whannel's book, *Blowing The Whistle*, is less of a strategic discussion but raises fundamentally important questions about culture, health and leisure. He wishes to discuss more than politics *and* sport in that he sees the need for a politics *of* sport — there is more to be analysed than for instance the very important campaigning against South African apartheid via protests about cricket and rugby tours. Socialist tradition has often condemned competitive sport as reflecting capitalist values — the dynamic of individualised survival in the face of entrepreneurial exploitation is seen as mirrored in the 'winners' and 'losers' on the sports field. But monopoly capitalism works to suppress and distort competition in order to gain profits, it does not thrive on competiton.

Another strand of socialist criticism of sport is to understand it as the replacement for religion as 'the opiate of the masses'. Lulled into a false sense of comfort and pleasure by the spectacle sport provides, the masses remain serene about their subordination. However this perspective, as Whannel compellingly argues, fixes the working classes as dupes and victims. There becomes no way of understanding working class resistance and defiance of capitalist domination, no means to assert and support leisure and cultural activities until some mythical moment after the revolution.

An orientation which refuses to represent those who are subordinated as passive recipients of oppression and exploitation is most successfully sustained in Jenny Beale's *Getting it Together: women as trade unionists*. I may be accused of partisanship given this is the only title so far in the series written solely by a woman, something which lays the series open to severe criticism despite the often-voiced and not so often enacted commitment of the other authors to raising issues concerning feminism. But I found Beale's book inspiring as well as challenging to read. She manages to steer a way through women's under-representation within trade unions and the limitations of trade union policies in terms of addressing the needs of their female members, without ever obscuring women's place in labour history, and their present and potential contribution to transforming trade unionism.

She suggests a number of ways in which women can enrich trade unionism; the style of meetings and representation not only presents barriers to women's participation, they make the unions on the whole remote from their members and therefore vulnerable to press and government manipulation. She illustrates with a number of examples how these barriers can be broken down, not least of which are acts of great courage by different women, including one who came to a women-only NUPE shop steward course with bruises on her arms, from a husband who wanted to prevent her attending.

Given the changing structure of work, away from heavy manufacturing towards service industries and office work, a trade unionism which clings onto historical traditions will be weak and ineffective in the present. Only by democratising the unions, by challenging the differentials and sectional interests which are the residues of both capitalism's organisation of work and male-dominated trade union practices, can there be a resurgence of popular and

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powerful union activity. Beale sees women as playing a crucial role in this, not least because they have different priorities and methods for pursuing them than their brothers. She discusses the findings of a Warwick University survey of NUPE stewards in 1974 which discovered slightly different patterns of activity for men and women. 'Women were less active in what they called the "real business" of trade unionism — representation and collective bargaining... Perhaps, they suggested, the popular view of how a good shop steward should act was simply a trade union version of the stereotype of the dominant male. Hence men conform more easily than women to people's expectations of an active trade unionist' (p31).

Books such as these play a valuable part in both widening the grouping which will want to read and discuss socialist politics, and provide a refreshing approach to some of the thorny questions which beset us in these far from hopeful times. But unless strategies and principles are forged out of the practices and possibilities which we can witness now, then socialism will become an increasingly garbled and obscure ideology of a wild-eyed minority. *'Arguments for Socialism'* can help to some degree in turning us into a clear-eyed majority, as long as it attempts to find new things to say and ways to speak them. Despite some criticisms of the books published, on the whole I feel optimistic about their being capable of doing just that.

Eileen Phillips

WHY ARE THE BRITISH BAD AT MANUFACTURING?
Karel Williams, John Williams, Denis Thomas
Routledge, Kegan Paul 1983 £7.95 pbk
ISBN 0 7100 9561.9

JAPAN IN THE PASSING LANE
Satoshi Komata
Allen & Unwin 1983 £9.95 pbk
ISBN 0 04 38106.5

If Britain has the most inefficient capitalism in the world, is it any wonder that the UK economy is characterised by low wages, low productivity and low investment? Two recent books each in their way encapsulate these 'problems' in a wider setting. One examines, through examples, the dismal track record of pivotal industries in Britain; the other portrays graphically the peril of lurching into the benign corporatism that is said to hold the key to the future.

Williams and co have prepared a scathing analysis both of the UK manufacturing sector in general and of three companies that are proxies for the sectors in which they operate. Their central criticism is that of short sightedness on the part of the owners of the companies — in some instances, the government. The book's style is at times irritating, a paragraph where a sentence would suffice, but this should not deter the reader from persevering. The book does not so much break new ground, although that appears, but refuses to adhere to comfortable models. Even if it is inevitable that incoherent management produces irrational responses from organised labour that does not help to improve a worsening situation. By sticking to close time-horizons, most UK manufacturing companies have excluded themselves from those sectors and products where returns are only to be had in the long term. This self-denying ordnance has led to today's symptoms of malaise, increasing import penetration and a widening technological gap.

The three cases studied, which comprise half the book, examine British Shipbuilders, British Leyland and a company that could today fund both these industries' accumulated deficits, GEC. The explanations are inevitably different: BS lacked downstream links with shipowners that may have stimulated innovation, GEC went for short-term profit returns at the expense of both employment and of innovation and BL suffered from too frequent changes in managerial direction and opted for innovation when it had already all but missed the bus.

All three case studies, particularly that of BL, suffer from the absence of any analysis of trade union criticisms and from the weight of academic inputs. Possibly that weakens the telling effect they could have when read in conjunction with the overall thesis. That said the book is a good read.

So too is *Japan in the Passing Lane*. The answer for some of our problems postulated by the current generation of Michael Edwardes' clones is to follow the Japanese example. There has been a fair torrent of literature extolling the virtues of Japanese industry, the low inventories, the adequacy of funding for long term profits, the high productivity. Read one way, many of the Williams *et al* ideas lead in that direction, but at last thanks to Satoshi Komata we have a book which says what it's actually like to work in the Toyota Auto Company. Many of the cruelties would be familiar to a worker at Cowley, Ellesmere Port or Dagenham — there are just so many more of them.

Japanese capital has developed quite differently from that of Europe and North America. It has learned from the generalised mistakes made by others as well as from the technology. Ironically the Williams *et al* studies look at UK firms and producers that have been forced out of markets by much better organised companies from Japan. But all British companies seem to want is the quiescence of labour that looks to be the norm in Japan. What they do *not* want is to make the managerial and financial commitment that says 'OK we lose money for the next ten years, but make it up in the following decade.'

Why are the British bad at manufacturing — because UK capitalism is not very bright. And its manifesto is misguided by assuming that it can pluck one facet of another culture's development — Japan — and insert it into the crumbling facade that is UK industry.

Brian Bolton

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Extra-parliamentary democracy; local and industrial resistance; socialist internationalism; YTS; the future of the left; socialist alternatives to the Labour Party; politics of PR; right-wing ideology; green politics; future of feminism; NATO and the Peace Movement; Post Common Market; Ireland; Immigration; Central America; co-ops; workers plans; local government

☆ ***SPEAKERS:***

(Confirmed so far) Anthony Arblaster, Frankie Ashton, Anthony Barnett, Caroline Benn, Tony Benn, Robin Blackburn, Mike Cooley, Carole Harwood, Madeleine Long, Robin Murray, John Palmer, Lynne Segal, Nick Sharman, Jeremy Taylor, Hilary Wainwright, Mike Ward

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Letters

OPINION POLLS

The roundtable discussion on Opinion Polls was not one of Marxism Today's brightest ideas. The secret of maintaining voluntary bourgeoise hegemony is to face the vast majority of people in the required political direction and then, where possible, to appoint to all its information channels agents already facing the same way. Thus if pollsters asked questions facing the other way, completely different answers would follow. For instance if polls asked 'Do you think Britain should spend a greater proportion of its national income on defence than its European allies?' public opinion would be reorientated. It should be one of our prime jobs to devise and utilise such polls.

With regard to the accuracy of the polls, the Black Country was not only inundated with the national polls, but a special Gallup poll was commissioned by the local *Express & Star* covering thirteen constituencies. The headlines, two days before the election, were: "Maggie storms on" "Tories devastating 14% lead in traditional Labour heartland of the Black Country." The Gallup poll over-estimated Tory support by 11%, Alliance support by 13% and under-estimated labour support by no less than 25%! The editor of the Express & Star did agree that the error was on the high side! It is highly unlikely that he would have spent money on commissioning the poll if he had not expected that it would serve the anti-Labour purposes of his paper. And if it had been a less sensational result it would, no doubt, have been tucked away on an inside page. This poll undoubtedly spread alarm and despondency in Labour ranks and cannot fail to have influenced voters.

George Barnsby, Wolverhampton

GANDHI — POLITICAL CAPITAL?

David Arnold's article, *The Man Behind the Film* not only contradicts Gandhiji's work and his personality but he also has distorted his teaching. Like other Marxist-Socialist scholars, he makes a kind of political capital, of course to prove his point of view.

How on earth could he write 'Despite his highly symbolic change from barrister's suit to labourer's loin-cloth, Gandhi never left this middle-class, Western-orientated world behind. He continued throughout his life to be influenced by it and to react sharply against it'. Did he read anything about Gandhiyan philosophy? He does not understand the essential of the Hindu philosophy.

Mr Arnold must be joking when he says that 'Western societies allow to their articulate minorities a prominence in the media and in public debate the poor and the oppressed in the Third World seldom enjoy'. Don't you know the Riots? Have you ever visited any Comprehensive school in London Mr Arnold?

In short Mr Arnold's contribution is very misleading and he has failed to grasp the philosophical implication of the Non-Violence. That's the stand Gandhi took; it has nothing to do with the Class-Structure Complex of the West. *Rahul Barot*

We welcome your letters for the October issue. They should be no longer than 200 words and arrive at the office not later than Friday, 9 September.

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NOTES

EMPLOYMENT LAW BULLETIN

Jeremy Smith writes: The second issue of the Haldane Society's Employment Bulletin contains a vigorous attack on the record of industrial tribunals. The picture that emerges is that no matter what rights employees may have on the statute book, if they seek to establish them in industrial tribunals their employers have an overwhelming advantage. It puts forward an alternative, replacing the existing system by one of arbitration, with special panels of people qualified to deal with issues such as sex and race discrimination.

The bulletin is quarterly and is available for an annual subscription of £4.00 from the Editor, The Haldane Society Employment Bulletin, 177 Holland Rd, London NW10.

SCOTTISH SOCIALISM

John Nicolson writes: Around 300 people attended the conference called by the All Party Scottish Socialist Society to discuss the question 'Where next for the Scottish Left?' The trade unions, the feminist movement, the Labour, Scottish National and Communist Parties were all represented marking a fascinating departure in Scottish political debate, which would not have been possible three years ago.

Given the continual onslaught by the Tories on the Scottish economy, the question of Scottish devolution was high on the agenda with Robin Cook MP, once a fervent opponent of the 1979 Scotland Bill, now arguing for a federal solution for Scotland.

NUCLEAR WAR IN GREATER MANCHESTER

Dr Gummett writes: Greater Manchester, Britain's second largest urban conurbation, would be virtually wiped off the face of the map in the event of any full-scale nuclear attack. It is probable that only 200,000 of the County's 2,800,000 population would survive longer than two months and those who did might wish they hadn't.

These are just some of the fighting facts presented in a new booklet written by Manchester University Staff Nuclear Disarmament Group (MUND). *Emergency Planning and Nuclear War in Greater Manchester* claims to present a far more realistic portrayal of nuclear bombs dropped in the Country than is contained in the now withdrawn Greater Manchester Council publication called *Community Self Help Survival Guide* which it replaces.

Produced at the invitation of the Council and with funding from them, more information on the booklet is obtainable from Malcolm Grosvener, PRO, Greater Manchester Council, 061 247 3583 or from MUND c/o Dr Gummett, Science and Technology Policy Unit, University of Manchester, Manchester 13 (tel 061 273 7121 ext 5076).

LABOUR RESEARCH

David Hall writes: Two publications from the Labour Research Department will be of particular interest to trade unionists. *Youth Training: a Negotiators Guide* provides a detailed critique of the Government's new Youth Training Scheme due to come into full operation this month. It also gives a checklist so that those involved in negotiating these schemes can ensure that they do benefit young people.

The latest issue of LRD's journal contains the results of its research into official statistics on London weighting. With the Government no longer publishing its indices the updated figures it provides will be widely used by negotiators in all industries.

Youth Training: a Negotiators Guide costs 85p (including p & p). *Bargaining Report* £2.50. Both are available from LRD, 78 Blackfriars Rd, London SE16 8HF.

MARXISM TODAY NOTICEBOARD

Marxism Today is planning a new section which will incorporate 'Notes'. This will be a free information service and will include short news reports, information on campaigns, and listings of forthcoming events, conferences, meetings, festivals etc. Pamphlets will be briefly mentioned but more detailed coverage may be given in the book review section.

If you have anything you would like included in this section please write to Maria Loftus 'Noticeboard Editor' *Marxism Today* or contact her at 01 607 3344. To meet the deadline for each issue, material needs to reach us by the 1st day of the month preceeding the month of issue, eg, for October material should reach us by the 1 September. It *may* be possible to take information up to 9 September by post or telephone (01-251-4406 or 01-607-3344).

ON THE DOLE

Joan Jacobs writes: On the Dole, the latest publication from the Federation of Claimants Unions is a comprehensive guide through the jungle of claiming benefits from the state. It is aimed at unemployed people whether they are claiming unemployment benefit or means tested supplementary benefit. It contains most rates to be implemented in the November 1983 uprating.

On the Dole will retail at £1.00 from bookshops but is available to claimants at a reduced rate of 60p (plus postage and package) from the Federation of Claimants Unions.

NOTES ON CONTRIBUTORS

Pete Wilkinson works for Greenpeace.
Pat Healey is a social services journalist and member of the Regional Executive - Greater London Labour Party.
Quentin Given is national organiser of the Chile Solidarity Campaign.
Bob Rowthorn is Reader in Economics at Cambridge University and a member of the *Marxism Today* Editorial Board.
Ray Forrest is a researcher at the School for Advanced Urban Studies, Bristol University.
Pete Carter is the National Industrial Organiser of the Communist Party and was until recently Midlands Regional Organiser of UCATT.
Dan Connor is convenor of the Ford Body Plant, Dagenham, and a member of the Communist Party South Essex District Committee.
Judith Crabtree is a member of the National Executive Council of NALGO and a member of the Labour Party.
Jack Dromey is the Public Services National Officer of the Transport and General Workers Union and a member of the Labour Party.
Bob Wright is an Assistant General Secretary of the AUEW (engineering) and a member of the Labour Party.
Sam Aaronovitch is the author of *The Road from Thatcherism* and a member of the Communist Party Economic Committee.
James Donald teaches in the School of Education at the Open University and is a member of the Editorial Board of *Formations*.
Ian Davison is a member of CND's National Council and Executive, and secretary of the Anti Trident Campaign.
Salman Rushdie is the author of *Midnight's Children*.
Anita Phillips is a journalist with NALGO.
Richard Dyer lectures in film studies at Warwick University.
Michael Chanan is a film maker/writer.
Eileen Phillips is a lecturer at the City Polytechnic, London.
Brian Bolton is a research officer for the Transport and General Workers Union.
Vicky Seddon is a member of the Communist Party Yorkshire District Committee.

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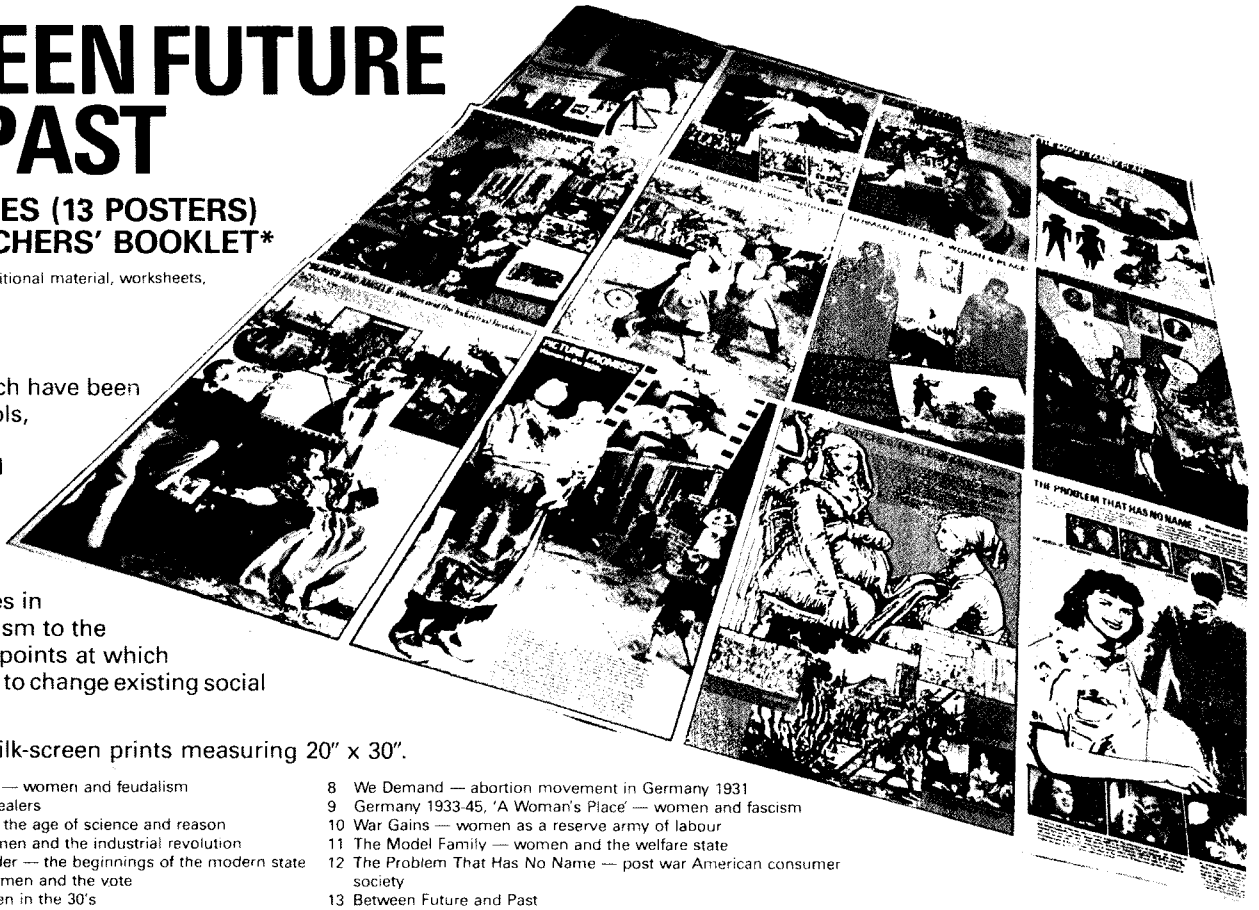

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8 We Demand — abortion movement in Germany 1931
9 Germany 1933-45, 'A Woman's Place' — women and fascism
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